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- FATHER-SON BUCK BASH P.50
- WINKE'S TOP WHITETAIL TIPS
- LATE-SEASON APPAREL PICKS P.22
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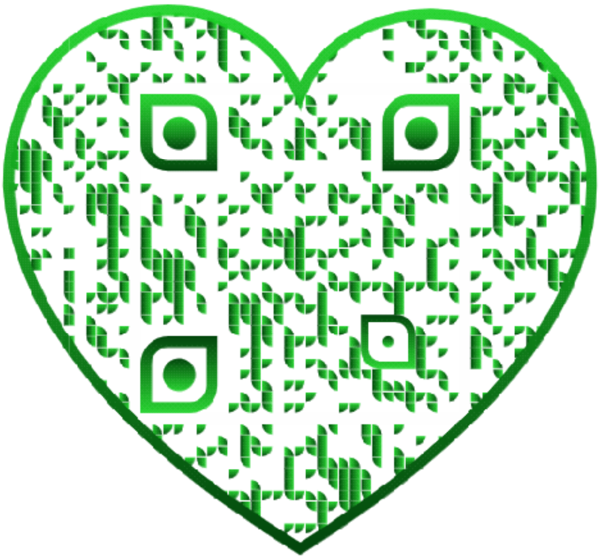

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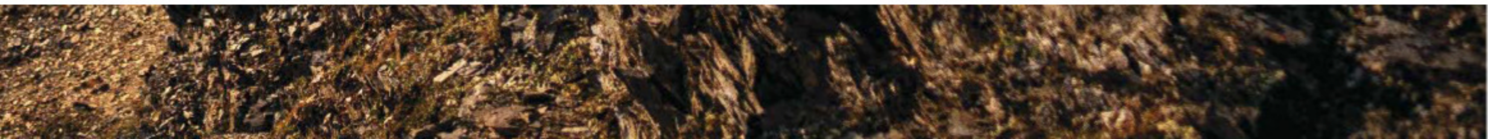

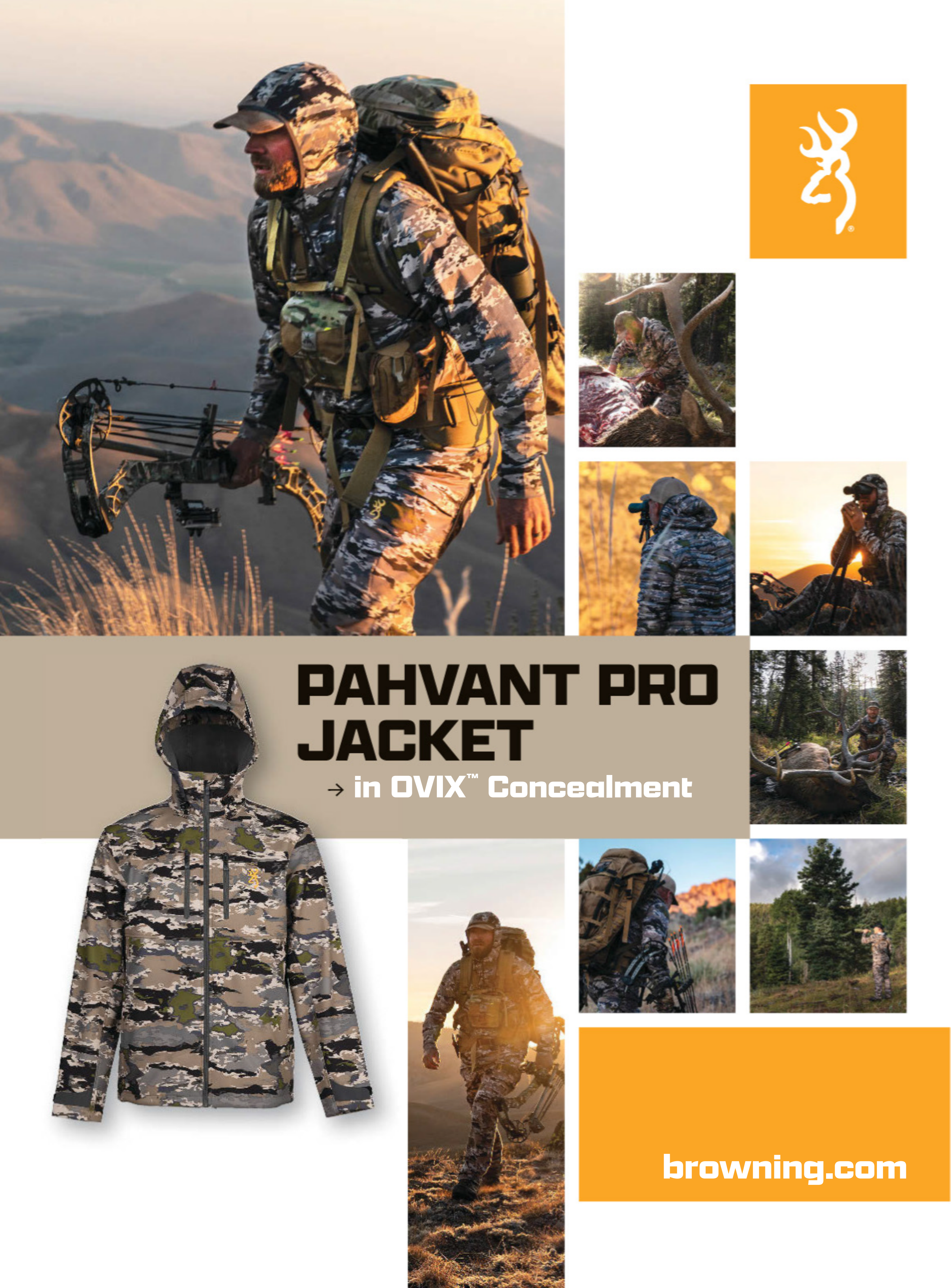
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IT'S ALWAYS FAMILY TIME

Passionate ambassadors for the outdoor lifestyle, the Cianciarulo family is always up for a new adventure. Entertaining viewers for more than two decades as "America's Favorite Hunting Couple", Ralph, Vicki and family continue their legacy of thrilling hunts — and the lessons they learn in the field.

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Outdoor

EDITORIAL

CHRISTIAN BERG | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

COLD COMFORT

I'M NOT A MORNING PERSON; like, *really* not a morning person.

This presents a real challenge as a bowhunter, and I've often said the hardest part of any hunt is simply getting out of bed. When I set an early-morning alarm so I can get in the field before sunrise, my first inclination is to hit the snooze button. Then, when the alarm sounds the second time, I have to give myself a prolonged mental "pep talk" until I muster the strength to swing my legs to the side and put my feet on the floor. Honestly, if I can just get that far, whatever else the day has in store is typically a piece of cake.

Here's another confession: I also hate being cold, and when brutally cold weather and early-morning hunts collide, peeling myself off the mattress requires almost super-human effort. As our staff put together the annual *Winter Special* and talked about various aspects of late-season bowhunting, my thoughts couldn't help but turn to memories of the most brutally cold hunt of my life…

It was November 2010 when I traveled to hunt Alberta whitetails with Classic Outfitters in the legendary Bow Zone around Edmonton. Although the calendar said it was only mid-November, Mother Nature was in mid-winter form; the entire region was gripped in an arctic freeze. During my week in camp, the average daytime temperature was between -20 and -30 degrees Fahrenheit, and the high temperature during my stay was a balmy 7 degrees!

I don't care how tough you are, bowhunting in those conditions is brutal. On the first morning of the hunt, my tree was frozen so solid I could not start the screw-in stand bracket provided by Outfitter Jim Hole Jr., who has clients remove stands each day because allowing ice and snow to build up on them is not only dangerous but terribly noisy, something that can easily spook deer in the ultra-quiet Canadian forest.

Hunting extreme cold is challenging but well worth the effort! Fellow bowhunter Earl Olsen from Rutland, Vt., took this dandy Bow Zone buck in below-zero temperatures during my 2010 hunt with Classic Outfitters in Alberta.

Later that morning, after improvising an alternate method to hang my stand, I made the mistake of letting my binoculars get too close to my face while glassing. The heat and moisture from my eyeballs created an instant layer of ice on the lenses, rendering those binos useless for the remainder of the morning. As for my laser rangefinder, let's just say that when I pressed the activation button and asked it to provide me with a reading to a nearby landmark, it simply laughed and went back to sleep.

A week of hunting in those conditions was a test of my endurance, but I learned a lot, such as the importance of drawing your bow every 30 minutes or so to remove creak-inducing ice crystals that form on the limbs. I also learned that despite the many challenges, hunting in extreme cold can be a great time to take a monster buck. Although I didn't come home with a Bow Zone trophy of my own, I had several exciting encounters with giants and was able to celebrate with others who put big bucks on the snowy ground.

Late-season bowhunting certainly isn't easy. There are far fewer deer on the landscape than there were on opening day, and dealing with winter weather requires special care for you and your gear. Still, for those willing to battle to the bitter end, victory can be extremely sweet.

Just like getting out of a warm bed before the crack of dawn, if it was easy, everyone would be doing it! **BH**

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How to Win at Love

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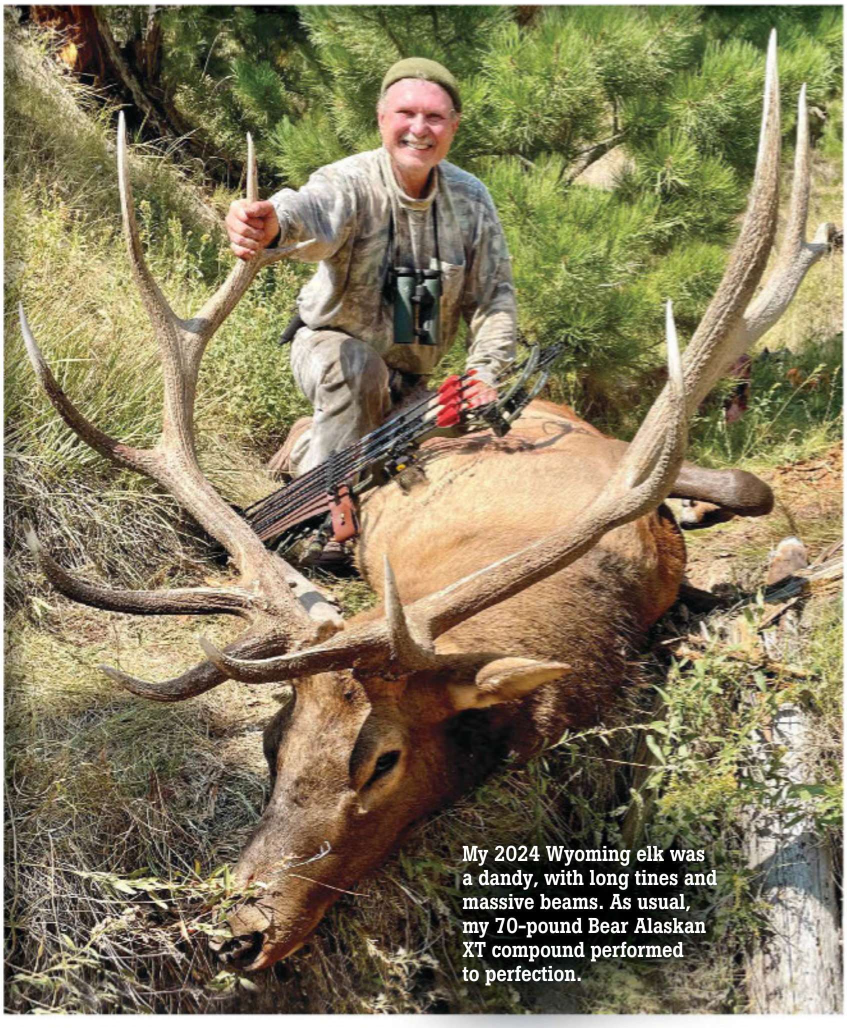
ON THE TRACK

CHUCK ADAMS



My 2024 Wyoming elk was a dandy, with long tines and massive beams. As usual, my 70-pound Bear Alaskan XT compound performed to perfection.

HIGH DIVE FOR ELK

HELPING HANDS MAKE EXTRACTING A BULL FROM THE MOUNTAINS MUCH EASIER

I TURNED THE FOCUS DIAL on my 10x40 binocular. Far below, the telltale tan side of an elk moved in the half-light of dawn. Seconds later, the crisp image through my glass showed a burly body topped by massive antlers. Even at half a mile away, the rack was impressive. All six tines per side were long — including the thirds, which are often short on mature bulls.

The canyon below me dropped off with a near-vertical high dive inches in front of my toes. Starting a stalk would require me to hike away from the edge, make a big circle and drop into the gorge near its head.

After hard hunting for more than a week, I had only seen two branch-antlered bulls. Early September 2024 was unusually warm, and today would be no exception. The Sept. 1 opening of big-game archery season topped 90 degrees, with only two days during the first eight that stayed in the 80s. Not ideal elk-hunting weather.

The rut had been slow to start, with only a handful of bugles before sunrise and after sunset. Elk shut up and vanished in heavy timber the instant sunlight hit their hides.

It had been a wet spring, with potholes of water in every canyon. The normally productive method of waiting near seeps, stock ponds or wallows in hot weather would not work — there were simply too many places for critters to drink.

The sun rose, and the bull walked into north-facing timber. I groaned. He was in some of the gnarliest and steepest terrain in my area, and I was hunting alone. The nearest road was several miles away. It might take a few hours, but I figured I could slip in close to the elk and possibly wait him out or draw him in with cow calls. But it was hot, and meat would surely spoil before I could pack it out. I turned and walked away.

The elk is my all-time favorite animal. He's big and beautiful, excitingly noisy during the rut and inhabits some of the most spectacular and diverse terrain in North America. The meat is awesomely tasty and healthy, and antlers on a large bull will take your breath away.

Every bit as important, this is a challenging animal to pursue. Even during the rut, a mature bull tends to be skittish and difficult to fool. As was the case on my recent Wyoming bowhunt, I usually pursue elk in areas with both private

AUTHOR'S PHOTOS

and public land. I keep track of property boundaries with my smartphone and onX Hunt app, knowing that bulls freely cross in and out of hard-hunted zones. It is rare that trophy elk grow old and naive in non-hunting sanctuaries. Most are harassed by outfitters on private land or the general public in state and federal areas. Trophy males get smart!

I had access to several tracts of private land on my 2024 Wyoming bowhunt, but elk were sparse and many were hanging on public BLM land. The sheer steepness and roadless nature of the area was a plus for me, because most bowhunters avoided it. The garment-soaking heat also kept archers away. You've got to be an elk fanatic to tackle animals under such dire conditions.

Sept. 9 dawned a bit cooler, if you can call 64 degrees cool. I knew the day would rapidly heat up beyond what my pickup's temperature gauge was telling me, but fluffy clouds blocked the rising sun as I hoofed along a ridge, and a slight breeze made hiking pleasant.

Suddenly, a bull bugled to my left. I peeked over the edge and instantly spotted five elk in a meadow. As usual, they were hundreds of feet below me, where a near-vertical drop-off angled to less severe slopes.

Even in the distance, I could see the flash of antlers. A quick look with my binos showed me the same bull I'd seen the day before. He had moved a mile closer to my parking spot into less challenging terrain. It was steep, but not broken like a half-eaten cob of corn. My pulse was racing as I planted my fanny to watch the animals and figure out a plan.

One mistake stalking bowhunters sometimes make is going after elk immediately — especially early in the morning. A bull might feed in the same spot for 20 or 30 minutes and suddenly move toward water, bedding cover or other elk. It's best to watch, try to establish a movement pattern and then intercept.

Precisely 25 minutes after I spotted the elk, the four-cow harem drifted across a side draw and vanished around the point of a ridge. The bull bugled — only the second time all morning — and followed his females. The instant he disappeared, I was on my feet and hustling down the steep and unstable slope. I had hiked the area before, and I knew there was a small patch of timber just in front of the elk. It was a perfect north-facing spot to bed in the shade.

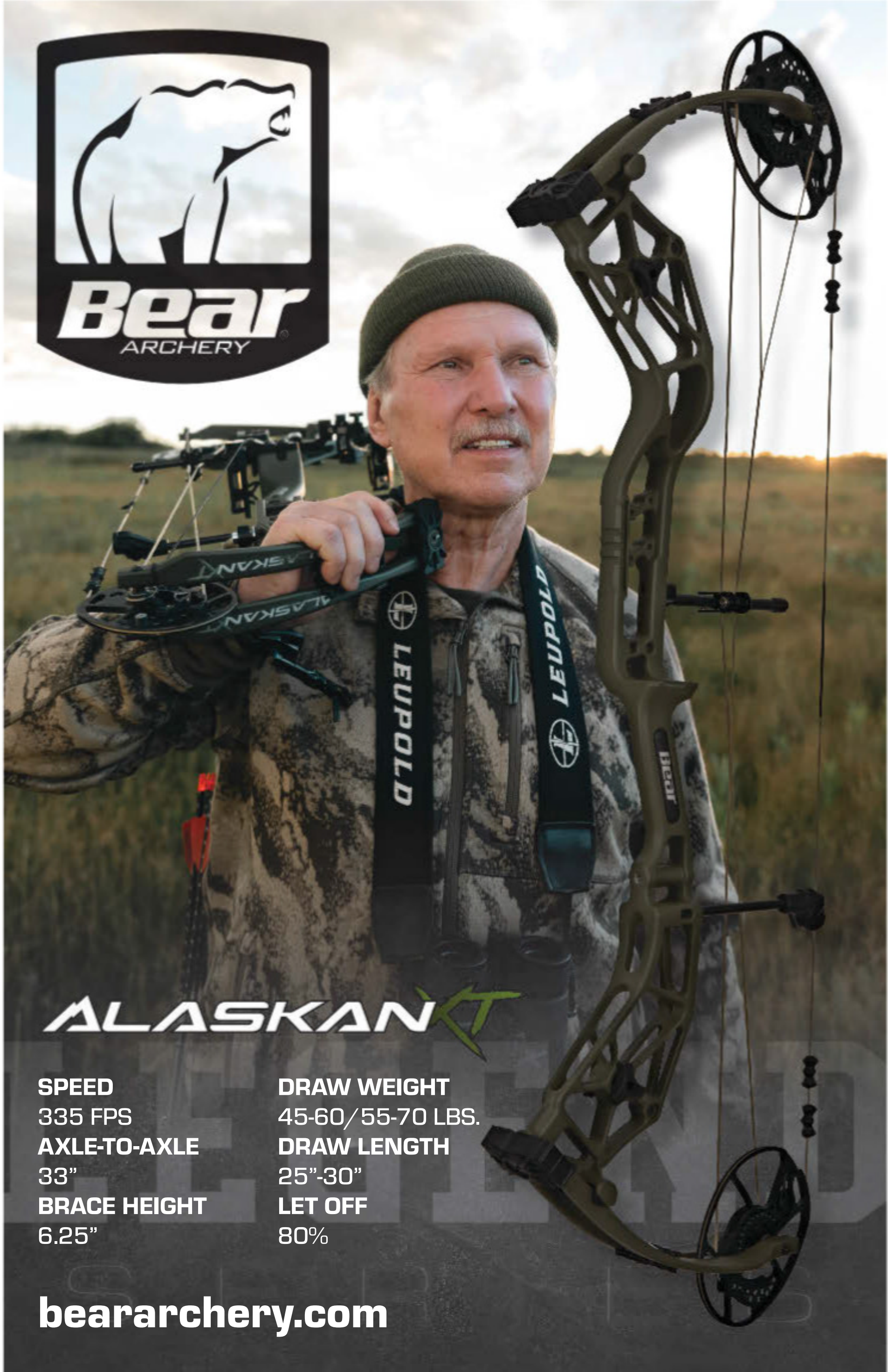
Unlike past mornings, a steady east wind was fanning my face. The clouds promised a weather change and a shift from normal southwest air movement — perfect! I slipped and slid down the mountain, skirted a 150-foot bluff and peeked past a stand of trees.

Two cow elk were feeding along the timber's edge, steeply below and barely 40 yards away. I whipped up my rangefinder binocular. The closest was 38 yards, the farthest 44. I nocked an arrow, backed behind a stunted pine and nervously gripped my 70-pound Bear Alaskan XT compound. With luck, the bull might also appear.

Another cow stepped out, and then another. Probably the same four I'd seen with the bull. They fed placidly, gobbling mouthfuls of grass.

Then a three-note bugle split the air. My heart leapt as an antler flickered and the bull swaggered into view. I already knew the distance. I eased out from the tree and drew, aimed and released. A split-instant later, the Easton FMJ 340 shaft and Magnus Stinger 4-blade broadhead smashed the bull's ribs. He whirled and lunged out of sight.

It was one of the quickest elk kills and shortest distance traveled I've ever seen. The bull staggered barely 20 yards



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and dropped in a tight ravine. His massive, 6x6 antlers green scored right at 340 Pope and Young inches — a dandy for the area I was hunting.

I butchered the bull, hung the meat and head on pine stobs in the shade to dry and cool, and packed the backstraps and tenderloins back to my pickup. I decided a four-wheeler could be maneuvered close to my elk, so I called my friends, the Moores, to see if I could borrow their quad. They lived a few miles away on their cattle and sheep ranch.

Tommy Moore was on a bowhunt for moose in Alaska, but his wife, Jacki, and son Shaw were home. They instantly volunteered to help. Jacki is one of those rare women who is very feminine but also athletic and tough as nails. At age 11, Shaw is already an accomplished junior rodeo star and in excellent physical shape.

In exactly 3.5 hours, with Jacki driving the ATV she knew so well, we reached my pickup with the elk. It had been tough going, with some scary slopes and side hills. We were forced to unload the four-wheeler twice for safety — about 300 pounds of meat and antlers — but we made it. That sure beat packing all the weight on my back. When the going gets tough, good friends step up to help! **BH**

Friend, rancher and expert quad jockey Jacki Moore helped me transport my bull two miles from a steep and gnarly canyon.

Once back to civilization, Jacki, her son Shaw and I had a chance to truly admire the antlers, which green scored 340 inches Pope and Young.

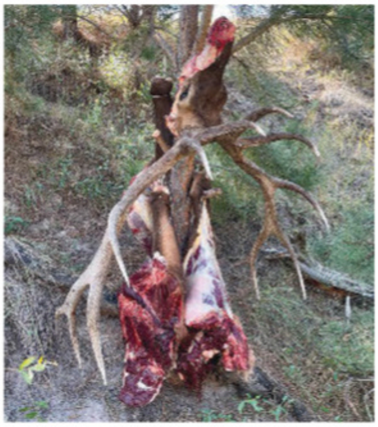
CHUCK ADAMS
BIG-GAME HUNTING TIP

PROPERLY CARING FOR YOUR MEAT

BOWHUNTERS have a legal and ethical responsibility to care for the meat they harvest. The first step is never shooting an animal in a place where retrieval is questionable. During early archery seasons, warm weather can quickly spoil a carcass, and predators such as bears might move in to eat your prize.

After you drop an elk, deer or other big game animal, you should quickly field dress and butcher it to ensure surface-drying air circulation and rapid cooling. You should always carry a sharp knife, knife sharpener, bone saw and hoisting rope in your pack to allow butchering on the spot.

Moisture and heat are the culprits that cause meat to sour. Drying and cooling meat retards destructive bacterial growth. Hang quarters in the shade if possible, or prop them on logs or bushes to maximize air flow. Even in warm weather, you will buy yourself several hours to transport meat to cold storage without a risk of spoilage.


On my Wyoming elk hunt this fall, I butchered my bull immediately and hung meat and antlers on the shady side of a tree for rapid surface drying and cooling.

ON ✕ HUNT

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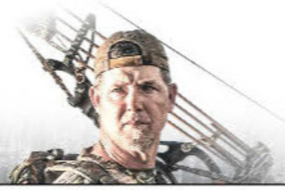

TRADITIONAL WAY

FRED EICHLER | TRADITIONAL EDITOR

A lot of "bowhunting" equipment that works great for compound shooters is not well suited for traditional archers.

SHARING THE WEALTH

IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW WHEN SWITCHING TO TRADITIONAL EQUIPMENT

WHAT'S FUNNY TO ME about the theme of this article is that I know some old-timers — perhaps some even older than me — might think to themselves, "What is Fred going to tell me that I didn't already know?"

Well, read on Doubting Thomases, because I think all new traditional shooters should be aware of the facts. These are the things that weren't mentioned to me or other friends when we made the decision to go to a traditional bow.

When I started shooting traditional, it was because I genuinely loved it. I shot more arrows for fun, and I didn't take shooting the center of the bull's-eye so seriously like I did with a compound. I also loved the simplicity of a recurve or longbow, and I still do. There's just one string and no need for a release, rangefinder, bowsight or even an Allen wrench to tighten screws. I shoot off the shelf with my recurve and longbow, so there's no need for adjusting a rest, tweaking center shot or adjusting the launcher that holds the arrow so the fletching won't hit it.

I even eventually reached the point that some of my mentors had mentioned to me — the moment that is like a runner's high that can only be obtained through hard work and practice. It's that special feeling like a slow wave coming over me, that first time many moons ago when I felt my traditional bow was a more efficient and deadly weapon in my hands than a compound.

What I was not told is that most equipment that claims to be designed for bowhunters is not designed for traditional bowhunters.

I was at an outdoors show a few months ago and saw a blind that looked cool from afar. As I got closer, I realized that like so many other blinds, it was way too short for a traditional bow. One of the salesmen even claimed it was designed by bowhunters for bowhunters. The problem was there was no roof room to accommodate a limb from a recurve or a longbow, even a short one. I explained this and the guy said, "Yeah, sorry, it was designed for normal bows." I decided I would pass on "enlightening" the gentlemen, but I started to think how many products are just not designed with us in mind.

Take hunting chairs, for example. Most have armrests. Armrests are fine for a short-axle-to-axle-length compound, but not really doable for a traditional bow without the string hitting the armrest. One of the few hunting chairs I have found that works well is the Millennium chair with its low straps that support the back rest. However, for a traditional shooter there are very few options. You have to go with something huge, or you almost have to go with a super small seat with little or no back support.

Treestands are another issue. Many

A Millennium Treestands chair, or a chair with no armrest, is a great choice for hunting with a traditional bow.

stands on the market, especially some of the climbers, just don’t work for traditional shooters. Pop-up blinds are another awesome invention as long as you aren’t shooting a trad bow. It seems like my chair is always too high or too low for the windows, and if I can shoot through the window, my top limb is going to smack the blind. So, beware fellow trad people — try out a blind before buying it.

I can often make blinds work, but it seems I have to modify the blind or dig a two-foot hole in the ground to put my chair in, just so I can shoot through the window and still have limb clearance. If you think I am being petty, just think of all the products that really don’t quite work for us stick-and-string hunters. Another example is a bino harness. They work fine with a compound, but after whacking a few with my recurve and longbow string, I decided that was another product that wouldn’t fly.

Broadheads for traditional shooters are another area where many companies miss the mark. Worse, many manufacturers are dropping heads that used to be great for traditional bowhunters. Mechanicals are a no-go with traditional equipment in my opinion, because of the reduced penetration due to lower foot-pounds of energy generated by most traditional bows. So, I will just skip over those, since that is a non-starter.

Sadly, a lot of great broadheads — such as one of my old favorites, the Phantom — are just not made anymore. The good news is a few companies still have some great options for traditional shooters. The Wasp Sharpshooter is sweet, the old standby Zwickey is still a great traditional head, Badger Broadheads are a solid option and some newcomers such as Iron Will have come on the scene.

In general though, if you’re a new traditional shooter, be prepared to have to tweak or change some of your hunting gear so it suits your traditional bow. I’m certainly not trying to stop anyone from switching. I’m just pointing out some things you need to be aware of that often aren’t mentioned to newcomers by those of us who have been doing it a while. It’s not that we are intentionally misleading you. It’s that we are so excited talking about how fun traditional archery and bowhunting are that we forget to mention the little things you end up learning the hard way.

As we close, here is a name to remember: 3Rivers Archery Supply. They’re traditional people and can help you navigate the equipment issues you encounter. Whether you learn it from me here or learn the hard way in the field, it’s worth swapping out your old gear for stuff that’s more trad-friendly. You won’t regret making the switch, although you may grumble under your breath, like I do, when a salesperson tells me some product is made for bowhunters when I know it really wasn’t designed with a traditional archer in mind. **BH**

For more information, visit fredeichler.com, and don’t miss Fred’s new show, “Everything Eichler,” every Sunday at 12:30 p.m. on Sportsman Channel.

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BOWHUNTING WISDOM

BILL WINKE

I shot this buck in the spine after it dropped at least a foot before the arrow arrived. I got lucky in this instance, but more often string jumping ends with a miss or a poorly hit animal.

THE TOP TWO **LESSONS**

MY BEST ADVICE FROM A LIFETIME OF BOWHUNTING

THE PURPOSE of this column is to create a place for me to pass along as many lessons as I can from a life spent bowhunting. With that in mind, I am going to jump right to the top of the list. Here are the most important lessons I have learned about bowhunting strategy and making the shot.

Hunting Strategy

Game animals are hard to kill if they know they are being hunted. Keeping them from knowing is the key to bowhunting success. This simple truth should find its way into every corner of your hunting strategy, down to the smallest detail. How this affects success can be something as innocent as where you park or something as obvious as how well you play a swirling wind when hunting around heavy cover or rugged terrain.

Game animals (I am most familiar with whitetails) are so good at detecting danger that you have to go to almost ridiculous extremes to preserve the element of surprise. It is the small stuff that gets you, and most of the mistakes take place when going to and from your stand (again, I am thinking specifically about hunting whitetails). It is so easy to make a wrong choice, and you have so many of them to make it is hard to get them all right.

Here's an example: One of my best stands is at the top of a long, timbered draw. There is no really good way to get up there, because you have to get past deer no matter which way you go and no matter when you make the trip. On calm days, that stand is unapproachable without the deer knowing I am there, because they hear me crunching in the dry leaves and see me creeping along. But on windy days I can hunt that stand much more easily without alerting deer. The wind covers my noise, and the moving vegetation partially covers my movement.

It is that simple; I have learned the hard way I just can't hunt this really good stand on a still day, no matter how badly I want to or what date is on the calendar.

Now, let's look at another situation. Let's take that same stand, but now it is the end of the evening hunt, and I have to get out of there. The wind died and now it is super still (something that often occurs at the end of the day). Now every deer in the area is either going to hear me leaving or react to the running of other deer that did.

I am going to make that spot worse by simply heading back to my vehicle at the end of the day. In the future, deer will not move as naturally there because of my clumsy exit. So, what should I do? Should I just take my lumps and figure the spot will need time to recover and hunt it anyway? Should I only hunt it when the forecast is for the wind to blow until well after dark? That may not happen during the times of the season I want to hunt it. Or should I arrange for someone to drive in and pick me up with an ATV or vehicle (if possible). Maybe I need to just sleep at the base of the tree and not leave at all. See how something as seemingly simple as walking away from your stand can have a significant effect on your success? Every decision you make is like that. They all affect your ability to stay undetected in some way, large or small.

So, my point — and the bigger lesson — is this: you have to go to ridiculous extremes to keep the deer from knowing they are being hunted. If you can do that, your success over a lifetime of bowhunting will be very impressive. I could list dozens of other situations where you can easily compromise your season with a single poor choice.

Shot Execution

String jumping; ah yes, my old nemesis. I suppose the most lasting lessons are the most painful ones, and when it comes to pain, nothing in the field has dealt me more pain than "string-jumping" deer. I don't think I really appreciated how bad this can be until I started filming hunts, for two reasons.

First, filming forced me to change the way I shoot at game for the worse, and that increased the likelihood of string jumping. More about that later. Second, filming allowed me to slow the action down with editing software to see just how quickly some animals react to the sound of the shot.

I will briefly cover point one first. Before I started filming my hunts, I always took shots at deer while they were walking, as long the range was moderate and the pace steady. I never stopped walking deer for three reasons. First, I primarily hunted from stands I put up that day or the day before; rarely did I hunt from stands I put up before the season. Thus, I barely had shooting lanes. I had to shoot through holes in the foliage, and it is really tough to stop a walking deer precisely enough that its vitals line up with a hole. Walking shots were way easier in that situation. Second, I never wanted the deer to be alert when I shot at them, an obvious outcome when stopping them. Third, I didn't want to take the chance of spooking them when I made the noise required to lock them up.

I grew up shooting a shotgun at birds and throwing a football. So, hitting moving objects was instinctive. It was easy for me. When I started filming my hunts, however, I had to make wider shooting lanes for video purposes. Additionally, I didn't want to send the wrong message by taking walking shots that some viewers, without the needed experience, would try to copy. So, rather than taking those straightforward walking shots, I stopped deer with a mouth bleat. That's when I learned all about string jumping, which isn't actually jumping at all. Despite the commonly used term, string jumping would be more accurately referred to as string ducking, as deer react to the sound of the bowstring releasing the arrow by lowering their legs so they can spring back up and flee.

I had no idea deer could move so quickly to drop and load their legs before bolting. I aimed at the vitals, and by the time the arrow got there, the vitals were 10-12 inches lower! I was stunned. Having the video allowed me go frame by frame and really analyze this reaction. I learned that with the deer I hunt in the Midwest, the reaction time is such that they start dropping by the time the arrow is 20 yards from the bow. Anything past 20 yards requires a low aim on a deer that show signs of being alert or otherwise inclined to react to the sound of the shot.

Over the years since I started filming in 2008, I have shot hundreds of deer. Now I am inclined to say that even some standing deer that are seemingly relaxed (especially does) will drop to load before bolting. Figuring out where to aim is the hardest part of making a good shot at a stationary whitetail. It is even harder in the South, where the deer's reaction time is even quicker than our comparatively sluggish Midwest deer.

I wish I had the perfect solution that would work in every situation, but I don't think it exists. Some deer you think are relaxed will drop and others won't. All you can do is aim increasingly low on all the stationary shots past about 25 yards. Yes, unfortunately, you will miss a few of them (the ones that don't drop) low, but that is better than hitting a few of them high and wounding them.

Now I aim bottom brisket on 30-yard shots and below the deer on shots past 35. Though my skills with a bow may be good enough to take longer shots, I restrict my maximum range to 40 yards, just because it is so hard to figure out where the deer will be when the arrow gets there.

Obviously, both my lessons this month are wide-ranging topics that could easily support a series of full-length features to really hash out all the details. But at the very least, I hope this column got you thinking. What may seem like a few simple words to you represent the distillation of a lifetime of bowhunting mistakes and lessons for me.

A wise man learns from his mistakes, while the really wise ones learn from the mistakes of others. It's time to be really wise! **BH**

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THE EMPTY QUIVER

DANNY FARRIS

Elk are often on high alert as they come in, and they are masters at picking up movement. If a bull catches the motion of your draw and faces you with his ears cupped in your direction, that animal is capable of big moves that can drastically change your arrow's point of impact.

SUPER-SIZED STRING JUMPERS

WHITETAILS AREN'T THE ONLY SPECIES CAPABLE OF JUMPING THE STRING

APPROACHING THE CREST of the ridge, I looked up to see a cow elk coming from the opposite direction. Our eyes locked, and we both froze. As the stare-down commenced, white tines materialized a few yards behind the cow, appearing to grow from the ground as the bull fed its way over the ridgeline.

The tines grew and grew and grew until the colossal bull was finally in full view. I quickly realized this was, by far, the largest bull I'd ever encountered with bow in hand.

With the cow at 30 yards and staring right at me, I prayed my bow-mounted elk decoy would prevent her from spooking. The relief was overwhelming when she eventually lowered her head and continued feeding in my direction. If she continued her course, she was going to lead the giant bull past me at less than 20 yards, and with a slow right-to-left crosswind, I literally had this bull all but quartered and in the back of my truck. That's when things began to unravel.

Out of the corner of my eye, a spike bull crested the ridge about 40 yards to my left and was headed right toward my wind! In hindsight, I probably should have cow called to try and stop his progress, but I remained frozen, simply hoping a shot on the big bull would present itself before the spike smelled me. I had no such luck.

The spike suddenly exploded from my left, causing both the big bull and his cow to whirl and circle in startled confusion. The cow, already suspicious from the stare-down moments before, stopped and stared right at me again. Following her lead, the bull fixed his gaze on me as I ranged him at 45 yards. Drawing from behind the bow-mounted decoy, the bull tolerated the movement, but tensed enough to let me know I didn't have much time. With the panic button in my mind fully mashed, I quickly found my 40- and 50-yard pins, gapped the center of the bull's vitals between them and released.

When I watched my Lumenok sail just over the bull's back, I was initially distraught, then furious with myself. The shot was well within my effective range, and I couldn't understand how I completely whiffed on an animal of that size.

We were filming this hunt for **Bowhunter TV**, so not only will we all be able to relive the misery of this moment, but we can also rewind the shot to see

ABOVE: JOHN CANNON OUTDOOR PHOTOS; RIGHT: BILL OWENS, BOWHUNTER TV

exactly what happened. Upon a frame-by-frame review back at camp, I was shocked to see this gigantic bull jump the string and duck my arrow as skillfully as a Southern whitetail.

Jumping the string is a phenomenon most whitetail hunters are all too familiar with. It happens when the target animal hears the sound of the bowstring being released and reacts by bending its legs and allowing its body to drop an instant before springing away from the danger. When the timing of this movement affects your arrow's point of impact, it's referred to as jumping the string, even though it would be more accurate to call it ducking the string.

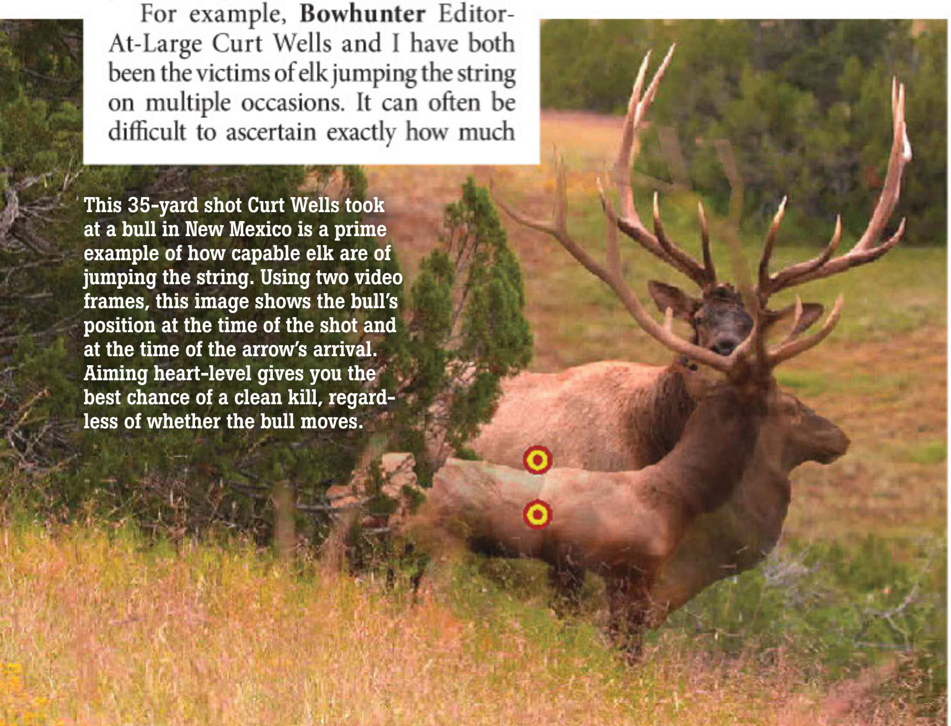
BOWHUNTER Contributor Bill Winke has done extensive research on whitetails jumping the string and encourages bowhunters to go into their whitetail hunts with a strategy on how to contend with the phenomenon. After experimenting with different approaches throughout his career, Winke's recommendation is to aim low in the vitals at heart-level on all whitetail shots. This gives you the best odds of still hitting the vitals if a deer drops, while also ensuring a lethal shot even if it doesn't move.

While whitetails are the species most known for jumping the string, and most experienced whitetail bowhunters have conditioned themselves to aim with their propensity to do so in mind, many of us who bowhunt larger-bodied species such as elk don't give the possibility as much consideration. Yet, just about any big-game animal is capable of moving fast enough to change the arrow's point of impact.

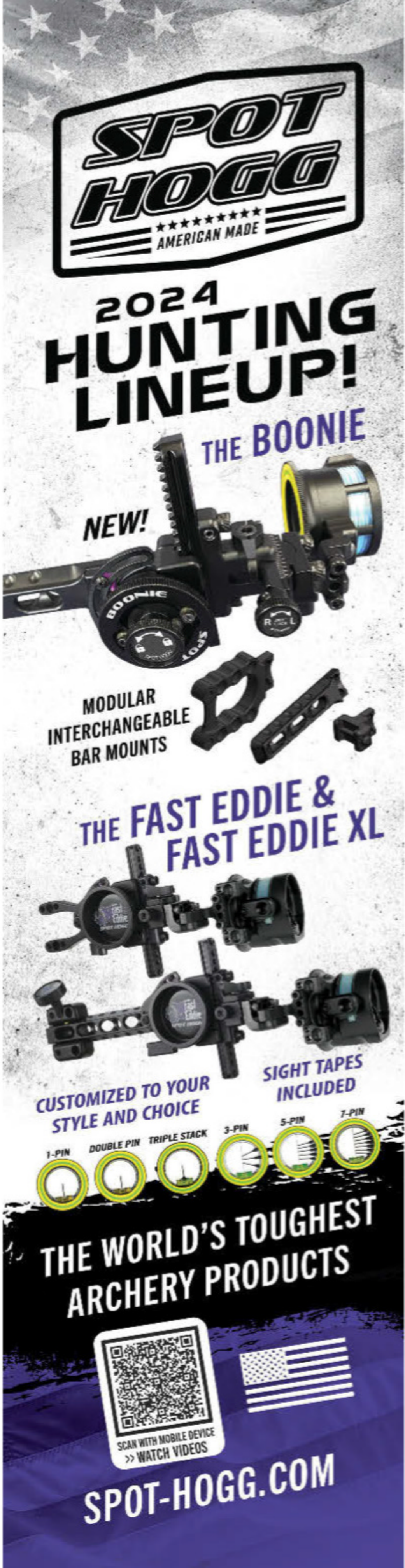
For example, **Bowhunter** Editor-At-Large Curt Wells and I have both been the victims of elk jumping the string on multiple occasions. It can often be difficult to ascertain exactly how much an animal's movement affected arrow impact with the naked eye, but both of us had the benefit of our shots being on video so they could be thoroughly scrutinized. The shots ranged in distance from 28-45 yards, but they all had one major factor in common; each elk was facing us, on alert, with ears cupped in our direction.

Because we don't tend to think of elk as string jumpers, many of us aren't as focused on aiming low as we would be while bowhunting whitetails. Therefore, when things don't go according to plan and our target animal becomes alerted to our presence and that little voice inside our head starts screaming to hurry and shoot before they get away, I think many of us naturally focus our aim on the center of their oversized vitals instead of holding low. I know it's exactly what I've done each time an elk has jumped the string on me.

After almost four decades of bowhunting, I'm finally beginning to realize I'm never going to develop the ability to calm myself and think clearly as a shot opportunity starts to fall apart. I keep thinking I should simply be able to read the animal's body language and adjust my aim as necessary, but I don't seem blessed with the ability to process all that information in the moment of truth. The sad fact is, when my panic button gets pushed, the blood in my veins is anything but icy. I suppose a few lucky bowhunters are blessed with the ability to think clearly through these adrenaline-charged moments, but for the vast majority of us, it's best to start conditioning ourselves to treat these super-sized string jumpers like whitetails and start aiming at them as if we expect them to move every time. **BH**



This 35-yard shot Curt Wells took at a bull in New Mexico is a prime example of how capable elk are of jumping the string. Using two video frames, this image shows the bull's position at the time of the shot and at the time of the arrow's arrival. Aiming heart-level gives you the best chance of a clean kill, regardless of whether the bull moves.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KNOW HUNTING

DR. DAVE SAMUEL | CONSERVATION EDITOR

Wild horses can be found in various places throughout the American West. Researchers were surprised to discover that mountain lions regularly prey on horses, despite the lions' significant size disadvantage.

PHOTO: DONALDMJONES.COM

WILD HORSE **WOES**

COUGARS EAT THEM WHEN THEY CAN

YEARS AGO, while sitting in a ground blind at a water hole in a remote area of the Red Desert in Wyoming, I had wild horses come to drink. It was a magnificent sight that is permanently etched in my brain. I'd subsequently enjoy other sightings of wild horses while antelope hunting in Wyoming. I must admit those experiences biased my thoughts on whether wild horses belong in the wild, even though they are not a native species to our country, having been brought here centuries ago by explorers and settlers.

Of course, ring-necked pheasants aren't native to the Dakotas or other western states, but no one questions whether they belong. Pheasant hunters sure love them, and the states with them like the money they bring to their economies.

However, the wild horse situation is far different than that of pheasants. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the USDA Forest Service are responsible for managing wild horses and burros on public lands. There are 179 Herd Management Areas located across 32 million acres of public lands in the western United States. Surveys of most of those herds are conducted every four years from aircraft. Then a carrying capacity is determined for the number of horses and burros they want on those herd management areas. The horses compete for food with mule deer, antelope and bighorn sheep, species native to many of those same lands. Normally, native species have priority over a non-native species. However, many citizens like seeing wild horses on the landscape and have even gotten federal legislation passed to protect the horses. The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 mandates that BLM follows a horse and burro management plan leading to an ecological balance where the horses and burros are an integral part of the natural system of public lands. Easier said than done.

Wild horses are in the news every year when BLM rounds up horses to bring numbers down closer to the carrying capacity. They then capture them and place them in pens. From there, attempts are made to sell them to anyone who wants a wild horse. There are never enough buyers for the horses captured, so holding them gets to be a bigger government expense every year. One major effort at solving this problem is sterilization to control breeding of the horses. Chemosterilant research has been done on female horses, and it works to a degree. However, it doesn't prevent pregnancy for many years, and the chemosterilant must be readministered. That can be done by recapturing the same female horse and administering it, or by using a capture gun in the wild. Either way, it is expensive and difficult. What is needed is a chemosterilant that lasts a lifetime. Progress in using chemosterilants on wild horses is slow, but it continues. The truth is, it may never solve the wild horse problem. Shooting excess horses is not possible under federal law.

With horse numbers being a problem, any study that shows that something is eliminating some horses will draw attention. Thus, the study I'll describe has some importance in the discussion of wild horses on the landscape.

First, let me clarify where researchers did a study that showed that mountain lion kill wild horses. They studied what mountain lions were eating in the Sierra Nevada mountain range and the Great Basin. Both are extremely dry areas. The Sierra Nevadas are 400 miles long and 80 miles wide, stretching from northern California south. The range is in California and butts up against the border of Nevada on the east side and the valley of central California on the west side.

The Great Basin is literally all of Nevada, most of Utah, and some of Idaho, Oregon and Wyoming. The Great Basin is more open terrain and has wild horses along with other prominent prey species for mountain lions. These include mule deer, antelope and bighorn sheep. Cougars eat all these species, but in the Great Basin they kill lots of horses. They don't kill enough to solve the wild horse problem, but they kill more than we ever knew about. We assumed the body size of the horses and habitat characteristics prevented much horse predation by the cats. That's apparently not true. Researchers found few wild horses living in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, but lots of mule deer. However, there have been some reports of wild horses there being killed by cougars.

Researchers put GPS tracking collars on 21 mountain lions in the western Great Basin (5 males, 8 females) and the eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains (2 males, 6 females). By monitoring the cats' locations with the GPS collars, they could tell when cats spent time in one area, and/or continued to return to that area, meaning there was probably a kill there. With this approach, they were able to investigate 1,310 potential kill sites and locate prey remains of 820 predation events. Mule deer made up 91 percent of the prey items found on the Sierra Nevada Mountain range side of the study area, but only 29 percent of the prey items on the Great Basin side of the study area.

Free-roaming horses dominated the diet for 13 cougars living in the Great Basin study area. Wild horses made up 60 percent of the prey items found in the Great Basin and were regularly killed by 10 cougars (of the 13 they had collars on). Wild horses were the primary diet item for eight of the collared cougars. In the Great Basin, cougars killed 0.38 horses a week, on average. Here is another interesting fact: Great Basin female cats killed and ate all age groups of horses, but males tended to eat young horses in the spring and summer and switched to mule deer in the winter.

As mentioned above, cougar predation probably won't limit the growth of horse populations, but they are an effective predator of horses of all ages. The conclusion is relatively simple. If horses and mountain lions occur in the same area, lions will kill horses. This study adds information on wild horses as prey that wasn't known before. Predator-prey systems are complex, and now we have one additional piece to the puzzle. Based on this research, cougars are not the solution to the wild horse problem.**BH**

If you have questions about topics covered in this column or on any wildlife-management issues or wildlife species, contact Dr. Dave at drdave4@comcast.net.

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TRIED AND TRUE

BRIAN K. STRICKLAND | EQUIPMENT EDITOR

Having quality cold-weather apparel, such as the new KUIU Super Down Haven collection shown here, is vital when you're hunting the bone-chilling, windy days of the late season.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KUIU

LATE-SEASON **ESSENTIALS**

REMAIN WARM AND COMFORTABLE WITH THE RIGHT GEAR AND APPAREL

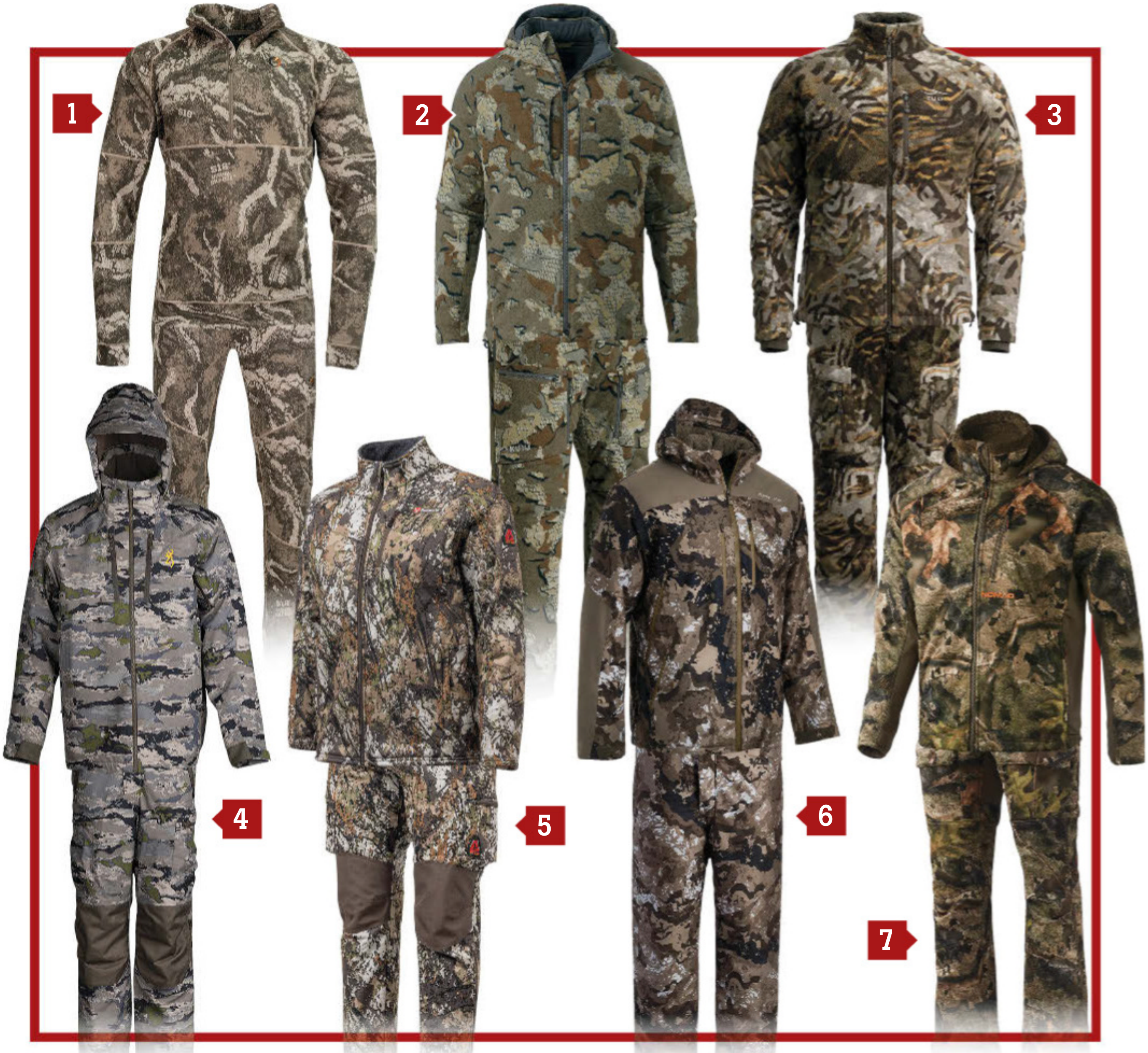
WHETHER YOU'RE A DIEHARD who likes to take every opportunity to hunt regardless of the conditions or you still have a tag burning a hole in your pocket as the snow flies, it goes without saying that late-season hunts can be tough. Wise deer coupled with colder conditions can result in few opportunities, making it hard to remain focused at times. You really can't afford mistakes at this time of year, and if you let the cold get to you, you're sure to slip up.

Fortunately for us, there are many quality options to keep us cozy in these difficult conditions, and starting with a good base layer is always a solid foundation. **Code of Silence** (codeofsilence.com) has certainly built a strong reputation in the past few years, and the new [1] ***FareWinds Merino-LR Base System*** ($100 each) will only increase their footprint in the bowhunting space. Rounding out the popular FareWinds TEC and Highloft systems, this new base collection is designed as a layering garment for those systems, or it can act as a standalone set in warmer temperatures. Designed with S-18 Camo with Neutral-LT technology, the pieces are built around the company's 240-gsm Merino-LR fabric that offers next-to-skin, breathable performance and stretches with your every move for additional comfort.

Although **KUIU**'s (kuiu.com) claim to fame is their technical Western hunting apparel and equipment, they have earned a spot at the whitetail hunting table with the Proximity collection. Designed from the ground up with the whitetail hunter in mind, this collection is engineered to remain silent when the deer are close while also retaining warmth in cold, stationary situations. Using proprietary technologies, Proximity apparel combines a lightweight, high-stretch, brush-face fabric with a highly wind-resistant SynthaCell foam membrane for increased warmth while maintaining breathability and temperature regulation. The [2] ***Proximity Hooded Insulated Jacket*** ($299) ***and Pant*** ($259) feature Toray 3DeFX body-mapped synthetic insulation and are also Durable Water Repellent (DWR) and SILVADUR antimicrobial treated to help repel the elements and keep odors at bay.

Designed for days when the temperatures plummet and the snow flies, **TUO**'s (tuogear.com) ultra-quiet [3] ***NIVOR Jacket and Bib*** ($299.99 each) combine a Microberber Fleece with a brushed tricot outer shell that's equipped with a DWR finish. Both feature body-mapped insulation to ensure warmth in all the right places. The sherpa fleece lining combines AeroGuard windproof nano-grid fleece lining with a lightweight Paralite Insulation to retain heat while also remaining highly breathable.

Browning (browning.com) needs no introduction, and the [4] ***Late Season Parka*** ($299.99) ***and Bib*** ($249.99) are just two of the many reasons why. Designed to keep you steady when the temps plummet, this collection is constructed from a durable, 3L ripstop bonded fabric with fully taped seams that incorporate a Pre-Vent membrane that is highly breathable and waterproof. Couple this



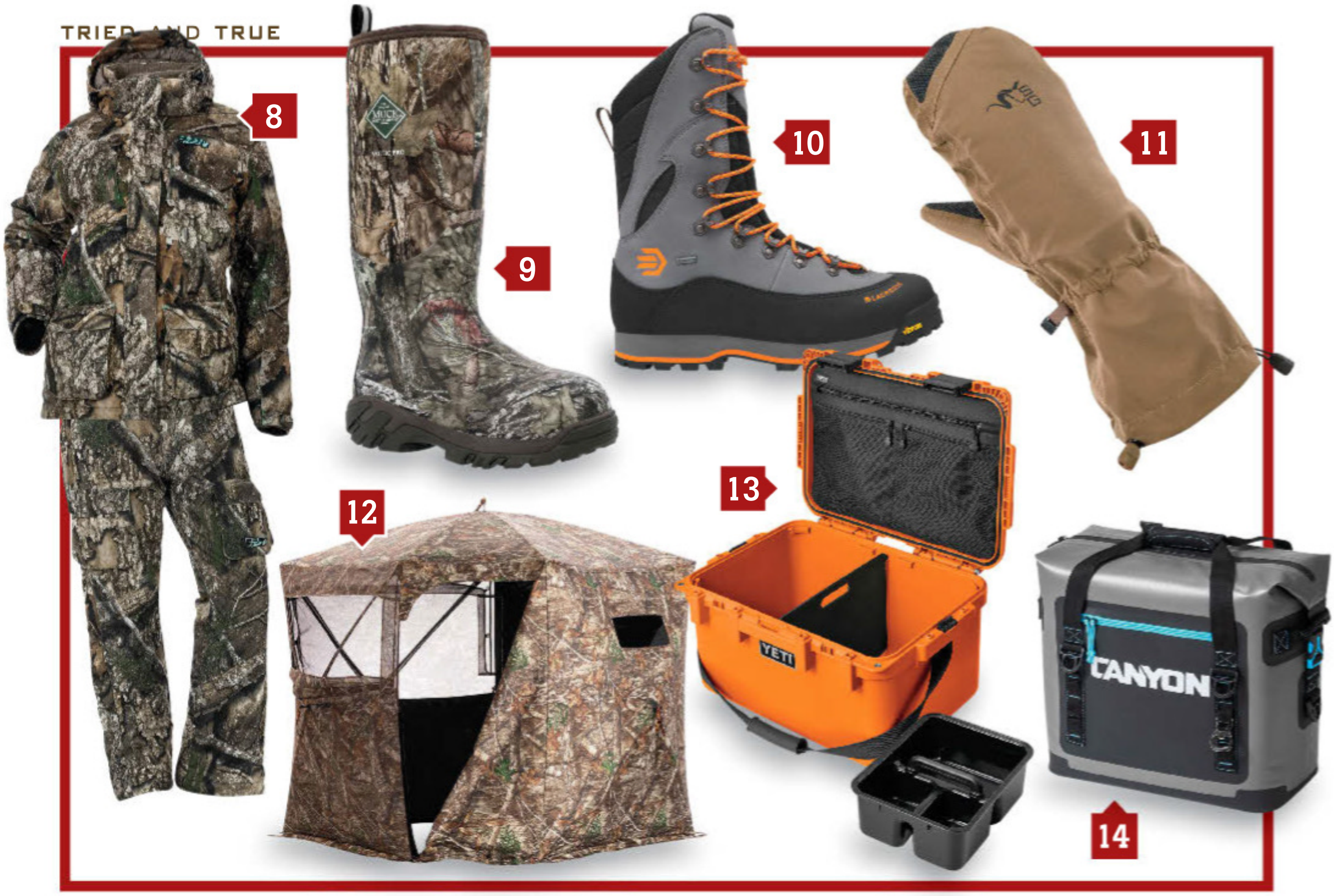
with the 133 grams of PrimaLoft Silver insulation in the parka and 80 grams in the bibs and you have a setup that keeps the cold and wind out and the heat locked in. Added features include overlays on the seat, knees and ankles for extra durability; three-point adjustable hoodie; and multiple pockets to keep your essentials accessible with little movement.

Huntworth's (huntworthgear.com) reliable [5] ***Saskatoon*** soft shell series is also hard to beat when it comes to value. Equipped with the company's unique Heat Boost Graphene sherpa lining, this series provides significantly more warmth without the bulk by absorbing body heat and then releasing it back at the wearer. Adding to this, the pieces work overtime by providing moisture-wicking and antimicrobial qualities, and with their quiet, four-way stretch shell with long-lasting DWR finish, they are windproof and water-resistant. The Saskatoon series is available in a pant and jacket ($199.99 each) and vest ($149.99) in Huntworth's Disruption, Tarnen and new Vertek camo patterns.

Designed to tackle the worst winter conditions Mother Nature can throw at you, **Pnuma**'s (pnumaoutdoors.com) [6] ***Torrent*** system covers all the bases. Engineered with their proprietary Selkirk fabric, this jacket and bib ($349.99 each) combine whisper-quiet performance with top-quality weather protection to ensure you stay dry and comfortable throughout the hunt. Not only do they offer a water-repellent finish, the waterproof interlayer coupled with PrimaLoft Silver insulation also provides wind-blocking capabilities. The hex-fleece interior lining also means extra warmth and heat distribution, while the Polygiene OdorCrunch and StayFresh technologies effectively neutralize, prevent and resist odor.

Kill unwanted noise while embracing the challenging conditions of those mid- to late-season hunts with the [7] ***Harvester NXT*** collection from **Nomad** (nomad.com). One of the latest in the Nomad line, this Jacket and Pant ($160 each) combine a quiet, brushed-fleece exterior with wind- and water-resistant breathable membrane and high-pile sherpa lining. Nomad's Silver-Z Scent Suppression helps to minimize your scent, while the jacket's chest pocket and the pants' cargo pocket make accessing essentials such as phone, rangefinder and optics easy.

DSG Outerwear (dsgouterware.com) is made exclusively for women, and the newest addition to the company's popular Kylie line of cold-weather apparel is the [8] ***Kylie 5.0*** system. This three-in-one Hunting Jacket and Drop Seat Bib combo



($249.99 each) has that perfect fit while also offering the functionality women need in the field. The set features a quiet, water- and windproof outer shell that is constructed from 120 grams of thin-profile insulation paired with a removable fleece lining. The set also sports fully taped seams and is treated with a DWR finish to keep the moisture out. Additionally, the bib easily converts to pants, and with its drop-seat design, it's easy to take care of business when nature calls.

Muck Boot Company's (muckbootcompany.com) **[9]** ***Arctic Pro Insulated Boots*** ($190) will certainly keep the chill out on cold bowhunts. Touted as one of the warmest neoprene boots available, they feature an 8 mm CR Flex-Foam neoprene bootie that is fleece-lined for cozy warmth. The boot's 2 mm thermal-foam footbed with cushioned EVA midsole adds additional warmth and extra cushion on the trail. Like all Muck neoprene boots, Arctic Pros are waterproof and have rugged outsoles for traction and stretch-fit uppers that lock in warmth.

Late-season hunts out West can be extremely challenging, so properly matching the right boots with the rugged, colder conditions can mean the difference between heading home early or sticking it out to the end. To help make the challenging conditions a little easier, **LaCrosse** (lacrossefootware.com) has added a new **[10]** ***LS (Late Season) GTX*** ($400) to the popular Ursa boot series. Featuring premium components and craftsmanship from the ground up, the Ursa LS boots sport GORE-TEX liners, double stitching, 360-degree mudguard, rugged Vibram outsoles and EVA midsoles, making them extremely durable and comfortable. At 10 inches high, the boots offer added support and protection from the elements. They're also available with no insulation or 400 grams of PrimaLoft.

Nothing is better than a good pair of mittens on those ultra-cold hunts, and with **Stone Glacier**'s (stoneglacier.com) **[11]** ***Altimeter Mitts*** ($159), you can't go wrong. This waterproof, insulated mitt system features a three-layer HydraShield shell with removable PrimaLoft Cross Core synthetic insulation liners designed for cold and wet conditions. Altimeter Gloves ($149) are also available.

Taking the simple, hub-style blind design to the next level, the **[12]** ***Rhino 180 Pro FD*** ($279.99) from **FeraDyne Outdoors** (feradyne.com/brands/rhino-blinds/) features two-way mesh material on two sides that allows you to see completely through the blind while preventing game from seeing inside. It also sports 270 degrees of adjustable, silent-slide windows and is equipped with Rhino's oversized full door so you can easily slip in and out without your gear getting hung up. The icing on the cake is the blind's 82-inch frame from hub to hub, giving you plenty of room to stretch or add company.

Whether you're out chasing game into the winter months, or heading to the local pond to do a little ice fishing, **Yeti**'s (yeti.com) **[13]** ***GoBox 30*** ($250) is the ideal companion to keep your essentials organized. Waterproof and virtually bomb-proof, it has a removable cargo tray and divider with pack-and-stack design. Plus, with its 30-quart capacity, it's the perfect size for carrying all those odds and ends that somehow seem to grow legs and mysteriously walk away.

Although often overlooked, there is honestly nothing better than a warm meal while sitting in the blind in the winter. As good as today's coolers are at keeping the cold in, they are just as effective when you want to keep the cold out, and **Canyon Coolers**' (canyoncoolers.com) **[14]** ***Nomad 20*** ($200) is the perfect size to keep grandma's home cooking warm and toasty. Its soft, abrasion-resistant design sports over twice the insulation as most similar coolers, and its 21-quart capacity makes it the perfect size to fit into the blind. **BH**

- FROM MEATEATER'S STEVEN RINELLA -
STEVEN RINELLA
ROUGH CUTS

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Never stop learning. Get an intimate look into the mechanics of hunting and trapping with renowned outdoorsman and host of *MeatEater*, Steven Rinella. On the all-new original series *Rough Cuts with Steven Rinella*, discover how a lifetime of learning can lead to a deeper appreciation of the outdoors.

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FIELD TESTED

CHRISTIAN BERG | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

OZONICS HR600

IF YOU'RE READING THIS and still have a buck tag in your pocket, your fall whitetail hunts probably didn't go as planned. Hopes for patterning an early-season buck faded to nothing, and despite your best efforts, the chaos and unpredictability of the rut failed to bring a mature buck past your hide.

Now, here you are in the late season, wondering whether you can make a miracle happen before time expires. I'm not going to sugar coat it; the odds are against you, and you'll need every advantage you can get.

By this point in the season, your local deer herd has been hunted for months. Many bucks have been removed from the landscape by hunters, and those that remain have had their survival senses sharpened to a razor's edge. Remaining cover in the woods is minimal, and reliable winter food sources are scarce. These are lean times, for the hunted and the hunter.

Given all that, you're going to need a great game plan to earn an opportunity. Based on years of successful experience, I believe using an Ozonics in-the-field ozone generator is a great help in doing that. The company's new HR600 unit is by far its best yet. Completely redesigned with a new ozone-generation coil, quieter fan and improved airflow system, the HR600 is capable of producing up to 20 percent more odor-destroying ozone than previous Ozonics units while providing longer battery life of up to 13 hours. The HR600 also features a pair of red LED lights to help you discreetly set up and pack up, as well as integrated wireless technology that allows you to control the unit via the free smartphone app or optional remote.

Ozone — a molecule consisting of three oxygen atoms — is a powerful oxidizer proven effective at destroying odors. It has long been used for odor removal in a variety of industrial applications and to remove unwanted odors from homes and businesses after disasters, such as floods and fires. However, Ozonics launched a revolution in scent control for hunters when it introduced its first patented, in-the-field ozone generator in 2007. Since that time, Ozonics has continued to improve and refine its products, helping countless bowhunters fool the wary noses of big-game animals.

Although I don't have space for a deep dive on ozone science here, you can find numerous articles and videos on Bowhunter.com, the Ozonics site or by doing a simple web search. While I can't say using an Ozonics is a "silver bullet" that will keep your presence hidden 100 percent of the time, over more than a decade of using Ozonics units I have had enough amazing encounters with deer that approached from downwind to believe it offers a very real advantage. I use Ozonics faithfully while hunting from a tree, and I believe its effectiveness is even more noticeable in the confines of a ground blind, where the unit can be placed near an open shooting window to neutralize any escaping human odors. This is perfect for the late season, since ground blinds also offer excellent concealment for your movement during a time when natural cover is quite sparse. The HR600 comes with a standard, screw-in tree mount for elevated hunting, and the company offers an optional Smart Arm Clamp Mount for use in pop-up and hard-sided blinds.

The Ozonics app lets you to discreetly change in-the-field operation modes (Standard, Boost or Hyperboost) for added concealment and provides real-time information on battery life and local weather conditions. Back at home or camp, the HR600 can pull double duty deodorizing your hunting gear and clothing when used in Driwash or Locker modes. It's also worth noting the HR600 offers an on-board charging port that eliminates the need for a separate charger, as well as the ability to replace a damaged ozone coil simply by popping it out and inserting a new one. **BH**

$499.99 *(HR600)*,
$47.99 *(Smart Arm Clamp Mount)*,
$63.99 *(Remote Control)* | OZONICS,
979-285-2401; ozonicshunting.com

FIELD TESTED

MARK DEMKO | ASSOCIATE EDITOR

BUSHNELL R5 RANGEFINDER AND BINOCULARS

AS A BOWHUNTER, having good, quality optics is an essential part of the game. However, many hunters don't have an unlimited budget that allows them to drop hundreds of dollars on high-end binos and other equipment. So, they look for solutions in their price range that cover the majority of their needs.

That's why Bushnell's new R-Series line is so exciting. These performance-focused optics are designed to meet the demands of today's deer hunters, while at the same time helping save some hard-earned money.

R5 2000 AB Laser Rangefinder

After testing many archery products over the years, some stand out as favorites. The R5 2000 is one of them. In fact, two things caught my attention right away. First, I've used laser rangefinders that had a red LCD display, and the R5 2000's black display contrasts much better and is easier to see in daylight conditions. Second, the unit is very comfortable in your hand, with the battery compartment and the contoured bottom of the rangefinder working seamlessly to form a cradle that makes it just feel "right" as you hold it.

As far as functionality, the R5 2000 provides fast, accurate readings of ±1 yard between five and 2,000 yards, with the ability to detect game such as deer to 650 yards. It also has a Bow Mode that provides True Horizontal Distance readings instead of line-of-sight readings for those steep-angle shots you might encounter afield. In addition, it has a Brush Mode that allows the rangefinder to focus on objects in the background while ignoring things such as brush and tree branches. In this mode, if more than one object is identified, the rangefinder will only provide the distance to the furthest object, and that's something that can be very helpful if you're trying to range a deer moving through thick cover.

The R5 2000 is incredibly easy to use, since all operations are done through the main power/fire button. The unit measures 4.4x1.6x3 inches and weighs 6.4 ounces. It also has an IPX4 waterproof rating, ensuring it will stand up to those rainy days we all encounter afield.

R5 10x42 Binocular

Let's start with the 10,000-foot view. The R5 binos easily cover every situation a deer hunter might encounter, with exceptional light transmission and clear, crisp images, even during those minutes right after first light or before dark.

Available in 8x42, 10x42 and 12x50 models, the R5s have an HD Optical System with BAK-4 prisms and fully multi-coated lenses for maximum light transmission, contrast and clarity. The lenses feature Bushnell's EXO Barrier glass coating that repels water, oil, dust and debris, making them smudge-, fog-, scratch- and debris-resistant.

I used the 10x42s this fall and was impressed with how well I could glass my surroundings even as it was getting dark. In fact, looking through the binoculars seemed much brighter than with the naked eye. The focus dial provided fast, precision adjustment for incredibly clear focus. Plus, the binos are definitely comfortable to hold, and the hinge keeps them firmly in place when you set them for your eye-to-eye width, which is great if you need to pick them up fast and quickly focus on a moving animal.

The optical system is protected in a rugged, ergonomic, rubber overmold housing, and the binos are nitrogen purged to prevent fogging from the inside, even in situations where you might experience extreme temperature changes. Essentially, they're waterproof (IPX7 rating), shockproof and fogproof, plus they come with Bushnell's lifetime unconditional warranty.

The 10x42s measure 6x18x4.92 inches and weigh 24.9 ounces, with a 330-foot field of view at 1,000 yards. All R-Series binos come with a Vault Lite binocular case, chest harness and neck strap. **BH**

$249.99 *(R5 2000 AB Laser Rangefinder)*
$219.99 *(R5 10x42 Binocular)* | BUSHNELL, 800-423-3537; bushnell.com

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AMERICAN Wild

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7P ET

NICK'S WILD RIDE
7:30P ET

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8P ET

RANCH AMERICA
8:30P ET

LIFE ON THE EDGE
9P ET

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SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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30 YEARS OF ADVENTURE

REAPI

YEARS OF EFFORT CULMINATE IN A SATISFYING PAIR OF COUES BUCKS

COUES DEER have always been my struggle. I just couldn't seem to kill one, probably due to lack of focus. For more than 15 years, I hunted these tiny desert deer off and on, mainly by spot-and-stalk methods. I'd drawn my bow back on only one good buck during that time, missing him cleanly from 50 yards. That was more than a decade ago, when I ventured from California to Arizona with a friend to backpack a little-known wilderness area. I'll never forget that adventure. I carried a 90-pound pack up a steep hillside for at least three miles before finding the only flat spot on the mountain to pitch my tent. There were no creeks or springs nearby, so I had a large, collapsible jug filled with water, in addition to other camping essentials, to lug up the rugged cactus-mesquite hillside.

When you're young and charged with motivation, you do things like that, relying on sheer strength to overcome challenges. Sometimes it works, but not all the time. Patience, time in the field and well-honed shooting skill are what seem to kill coveted trophy animals the most. I've learned this the hard way, through trial and error.

In 2023, I decided I had enough of not killing Coues deer. I would scout, strategize and hunt with a newfound fervor and finally get the best of these diminutive trick artists. In the past, I was too stricken with family and work responsibilities — not to mention mule deer, whitetail and elk hunts — to give my undivided attention to Coues deer. No more, I vowed. Things were settling down at work and at home, with my two very special daughters now in college. It felt right, and with mama's blessing, of course, it was time to immerse myself in Coues deer hunting.

INTENSE SCOUTING

After an early season of antelope hunting and joining a few friends on their general-season deer hunts, November seemed to arrive in a blink. In the weeks prior, I had poured over forest and topo maps with tenacity, formulating my Coues hunting plans. Before any hunt, I like to devise a solid Plan A, Plan B and even a Plan C, as you never know what to expect in the field, especially when hunting public land.

Besides, the effort and time you spend scouting make the end result more rewarding. I enjoy the scouting process immensely; it's a big part of the hunt for me. Aside from studying paper maps and online sources such as onX and Google Earth, it's critical to spend time putting boots on the ground in potential hunting spots. Based on personal experience, 70 percent of the good-looking "map spots" don't shape up to be good areas at all. So, separating the best from the rest is a must. If you wait to do this until the first week of the season, you'll waste precious time and get very frustrated. Put in the time beforehand and reap the rewards later.

This mindset prepared me well for the mid-December hunting season. After several days of devising plans, driving nasty 4x4 roads and burning lots of boot leather, I had numerous ground blind and stand spots picked out — and it paid off. Despite several foiled encounters with bucks that scurried off because of an errant wind or a ground blind that stuck out like a sore thumb in the sunlight, I managed to shoot my first Coues deer at 42 yards. He wasn't a big buck, but with the final days of the season looming, ask me if I cared. It was a memorable experience that culminated with a well-placed arrow to the deer's vitals. Best yet, that buck provided some of the tastiest venison I've ever had. What a bonus!

HEADED SOUTH

On Jan. 1, 2024, I had a new Coues deer tag in my pocket. However, my relatively close-to-home honey hole had just about met its harvest quota, a relatively new thing for Arizona's

After 15 years of pursuing Coues deer, I finally arrowed my first buck in mid-December of 2023. Although the buck didn't sport a trophy rack, it was a very gratifying success.

NG THE REWARDS

BY JOE BELL,
TECHNICAL EDITOR

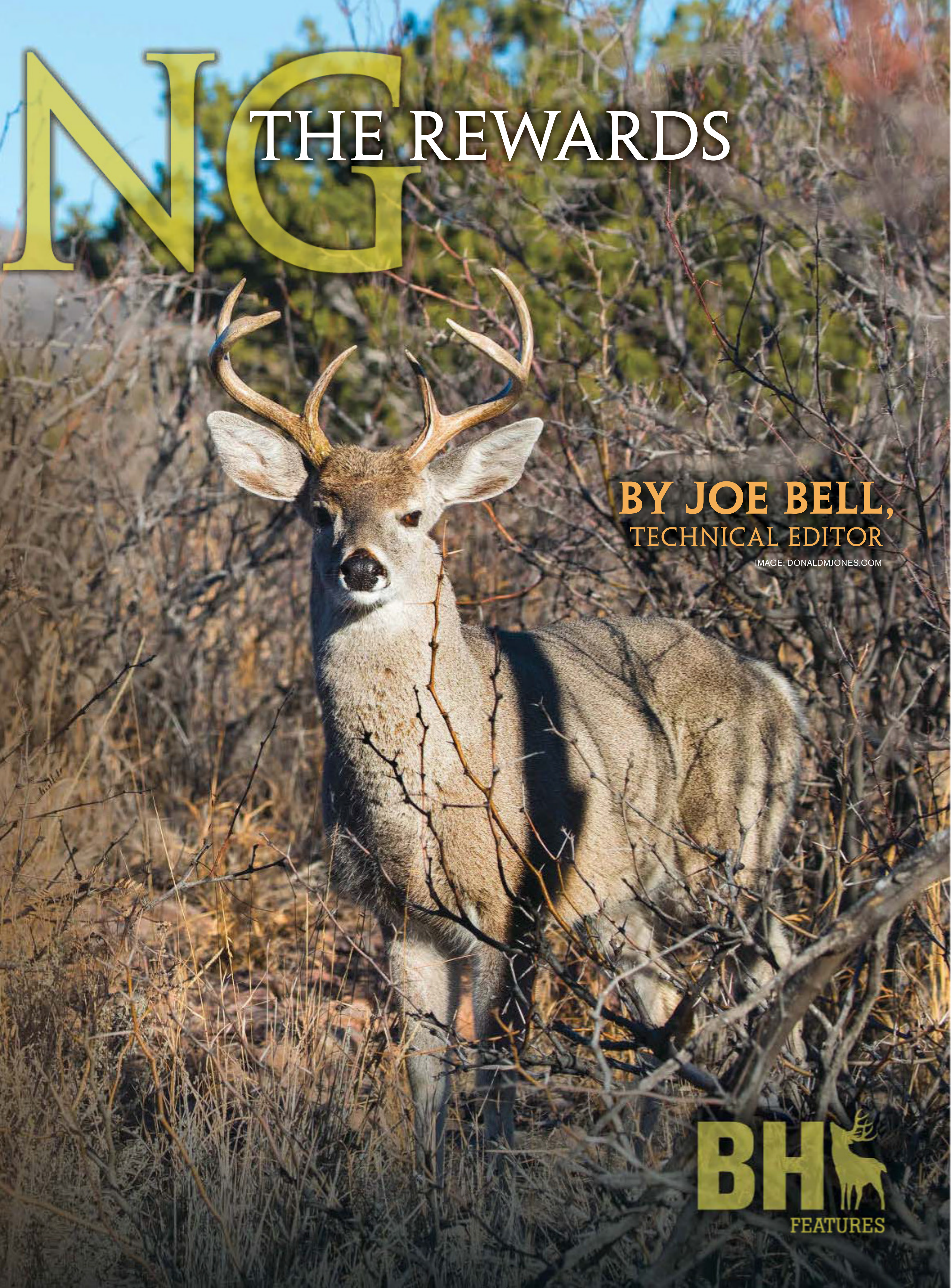

IMAGE: DONALDMJONES.COM

over-the-counter units. I had anticipated this in the weeks prior. So, I set Plan B into motion. Besides, I was ready to stalk Coues deer again in the more open, desert-like landscapes, instead of the tangled pinyon-juniper country near home. One of my favorite areas for doing this is in southern Arizona.

We had several winter storms in January, so I kept looking at the weather forecast to figure out when to embark on my next adventure. Soon enough, I was packing for a six-day journey, gathering essentials for a solo wilderness backpack or remote truck-camp hunt. I often use both methods, depending on hunting pressure, the lay of the land and where game is most concentrated.

The five-hour drive to the hunting area went without a hitch, but it was well after dark by the time I arrived at my camping spot. I made a quick meal and crawled into the back of my camper-covered pickup.

These mountains were special to me, since I had backpacked here with my oldest daughter, Mikaela. We saw a few bucks on that trip but mainly froze our behinds off. The nighttime temps dropped below 10 degrees, and despite using 0-degree sleeping bags and high-tech inflatable pads, we were still chilled to the bone!

My plan was to head up a prominent ridgeline at sunup and glass with my Swarovski 15x56 binoculars. I wanted to take inventory of animals within the various foothills and creek bottoms just inside the wilderness boundary. The two big bucks I'd seen the year prior were less than a mile from the trailhead.

By daybreak, I had my trusty Badlands 2800 pack on, filled with optical gear, fruit and a variety of snacks, water and game bags. I have used the same pack for the last 10-plus years for extended day treks, quick overnighters and routine meat packouts, and it keeps on truckin'. It's extremely functional, tough and quiet — the type of gear you'll need in the rugged environs Coues deer call home.

I crept along the spine of the ridge, stopping at specific vantage points to glass terrain. I began picking up a few does but no bucks. I also noticed plenty of old and even fresh boot tracks. It wasn't long before I spied two bowhunters working the same ridgeline. The country was too open for all of us, so I decided to drop off the hillside and head to the other side of the valley.

On my way, I came across a small 7-pointer. I closed in as much as I could, but my goal was to harvest a mature Coues buck, so I backed off. Besides, I knew my tag would be good for next season as well, and I was soaking up the beauty of my surroundings. In many ways, the reward was already mine. It's good to be thankful anytime you have the ability to hike and admire this country.

Despite seeing other hunters, things were still looking up. I just had a Coues buck within shooting distance, and I had been in the field fewer than three hours. My goal now was to

Coues deer live in all sorts of mountainous landscapes, from desert lowlands to pinyon-juniper foothills to ponderosa pine regions. Hunters must adapt to these environments, utilizing hunting methods that are effective based on the terrain. Good glass is a must when hunting Coues deer country. I relied on my 15X Swarovski binoculars to help me locate and stalk bucks throughout my hunts.

reach a specific canyon where I had seen the majority of the deer last January. If there was good activity there, I'd devise a spike-out plan using my bivvy gear. This would put me in a great position to hunt at first light, when deer were most active.

As I approached the canyon, I heard a whistle. I looked up and saw a group of hunters. This time, there were four of them, all wearing overnight packs. I couldn't believe it. My plan of hunting the wilderness seemed ruined. I became discouraged and somewhat embarrassed as I swapped directions and made a beeline for the truck.

IMPLEMENTING PLAN C

During my pre-season scouting, I had thought heavily about alternate hunting plans and kept coming back to an area on the other side of the valley, across from the designated wilderness area. Here was a smaller mountain range, yet in my opinion, a much more rugged one, due to massive rock outcroppings and sheer cliffs. I had hunted this region a long time ago but accessed the mountains from the opposite side. On this side of the range, there were no roads or hiking trails. It was bushwhacking only!

The next day, I drove my truck across the valley and found a nice turn-out spot along the only 4x4 road in the area. I hiked a little way and set up my 15-power glass to pick apart the terrain. About 1.5-2 miles away, I began spotting deer — four does. I continued to glass and noticed a few more deer, but they were all does. They were all traveling across a bench-like area below the highest knobs.

The best Coues deer country is usually remote, and backpack hunting is recommended in order to access productive hunting spots.

I visualized different hiking paths to the deer, but each one seemed pretty daunting when traveling with a heavy pack on. I also wondered about drinking water. *Would there be any? And would there be bucks pursuing those does?*

By the time the sun dipped below the horizon, I decided to give my trek-in plan a try and began sorting through supplies and loading my expedition-size pack. As I was doing this, I heard the sound of a truck approaching. It was a hunter, and he exited his vehicle and began walking my way. *Interesting,* I thought.

He approached and quickly began apologizing for "messing up" my hunting spot.

"I just got here a little while ago. You did no harm," I told him.

The hunter shot a buck just before dark but couldn't locate it. But he'd be back at first light, blood-trailing. I offered my assistance, of course, but he felt confident he could track down the deer on his own. Like mine, his name was Joe, which seemed funny at the time.

"I'll hunt well away from where you shot the deer," I assured him.

"I would certainly appreciate that," he replied.

With the mountains as complex as they were, he suggested I follow him into the hills in the morning, then he'd point out a good ridge for me to hike along. He seemed very familiar with the area, so I jumped at the offer. I would camp right where my truck was parked, waiting for him to return at dawn. Plan C was set.

LEARNING THE COUNTRY

My new friend Joe showed up just as the sun was poking above the horizon. We made our way down into a valley and across a barbed-wire fence. "Head toward those big rocks and you'll be able to follow that ridge for a ways," Joe told me as he pointed to the spot. We then parted ways, wishing each other good luck.

About 45 minutes later, I was still-hunting along that ridge when two deer shot out from below me. I was able to pick them up again on the far side of the canyon — a nice 8-point buck and doe. The buck was in full-rut mode as he chased the female across the rock-studded topography. Then they disappeared like a puff of smoke as they entered some thick scrub. I glassed the hills beyond the deer, picking up a few does, but nothing else. Soon, the sun's rays began to beat down on my face, so I looked for shady areas to follow in the main valley, hoping to eventually explore the region I had glassed the day prior.

On my way, I ran into Joe, unbelievably. He had found his buck, and it went a little further than expected. He suggested I hunt where he had seen other bucks. He pointed to a prominent ridgeline and suggested I begin my hunt there early in the morning.

The next day found me lurking around this honey hole, eyes peeled for movement. A little after daybreak, a doe jutted out from the brush, less than 20 yards away. I was moving ultra-slow, still-hunting, and never saw a glimpse of the deer until it frantically bolted away. I figured I'd utilize a combination of hunting tactics in this area, hoping to make something happen. The terrain was varied, with semi-open ridges, plateaus and small valleys.

At one point, as I dropped below the ridgeline, I noticed an area with lots of tracks. I found a rock to sit on and began calling, making a series of buck grunts and fawn bleats. I scanned my surroundings, but nothing appeared.

My January 2024 DIY, public-land Coues buck was a true trophy, with wide main beams and eight symmetrical points.

FINAL MOMENTS

I moved back up to the ridgeline, continuing my still-hunting sequence. Suddenly, a glimpse of movement caught my eye. It was two big bucks, less than 45 yards away, and both were looking away, completely unaware of my presence!

Quickly, I took cover behind a big rock and latched onto the rangefinder tethered around my neck. The unit flashed, "43 yards," then "46 yards." I came to full draw immediately, but there was no shot as the deer moved slowly through thick grass.

I had to let my bow down. The bucks were now 55-60 yards away, moving through the dense understory. Then the lead buck took a few steps and was clear from the vegetation. I came to full draw again. As he stopped at 54 yards, I eased the sight pin to his chest and began applying tension, but then he suddenly shifted positions. I couldn't get the shot off, so I let down again.

The second and slightly larger buck followed the same path, presenting a shot just before stepping behind the thick brush. I quickly planted the 50-yard pin high and swiftly pulled through the shot. The bow thudded, followed by the distinct "thump-thump" sound of the arrow passing through the deer. Both animals thundered away, with my buck hobbling up and over the ridgeline. My instincts told me the shot may have been a little far back, but I wasn't positive.

I waited about 30 minutes before looking for my arrow. While searching the heavy grass for the arrow, I noticed a small buck below me, less than 30 yards away and clueless of my presence. *Unbelievable,* I thought.

I eventually found the arrow, which was covered in blood and some streaks of brown matter. I didn't like what I saw, so I decided to wait before following the blood trail.

Later, I followed the sign up and over the ridgeline. About 200 yards down into the next valley, I found my buck sprawled out between two boulders. I was completely stunned by the sight of this great animal. So much time and work had gone into harvesting this deer — and a lot of luck, too. Rarely does a hunter traipse around Coues deer country only to stumble upon two big bucks within shooting distance.

The stars had certainly aligned for me during this entire deer season. Two Coues bucks taken in fewer than 30 days was quite a blessing, but maybe it was more than that. I couldn't help but wonder, *Was I simply reaping the rewards of years of bowhunting effort?* In a lot of ways, I believed I was, knowing that persistence and passion almost always count for something in the bowhunting woods. BH

Author's Notes: On this hunt, I used a Hoyt Ventum Pro 30 bow, Spot-Hogg Hunter MRT 7-pin sight, Easton A/C arrows, G5 Striker V2 100-grain broadheads, T.R.U. Ball release aid, Swarovski optics, Crispi Nevada boots, Badlands and Kifaru backpacks and Sitka garments.

Technical Editor Joe Bell is a longtime archery industry professional and successful DIY bowhunter who pursues big game across the West. He lives in northern Arizona with his wife and two daughters.

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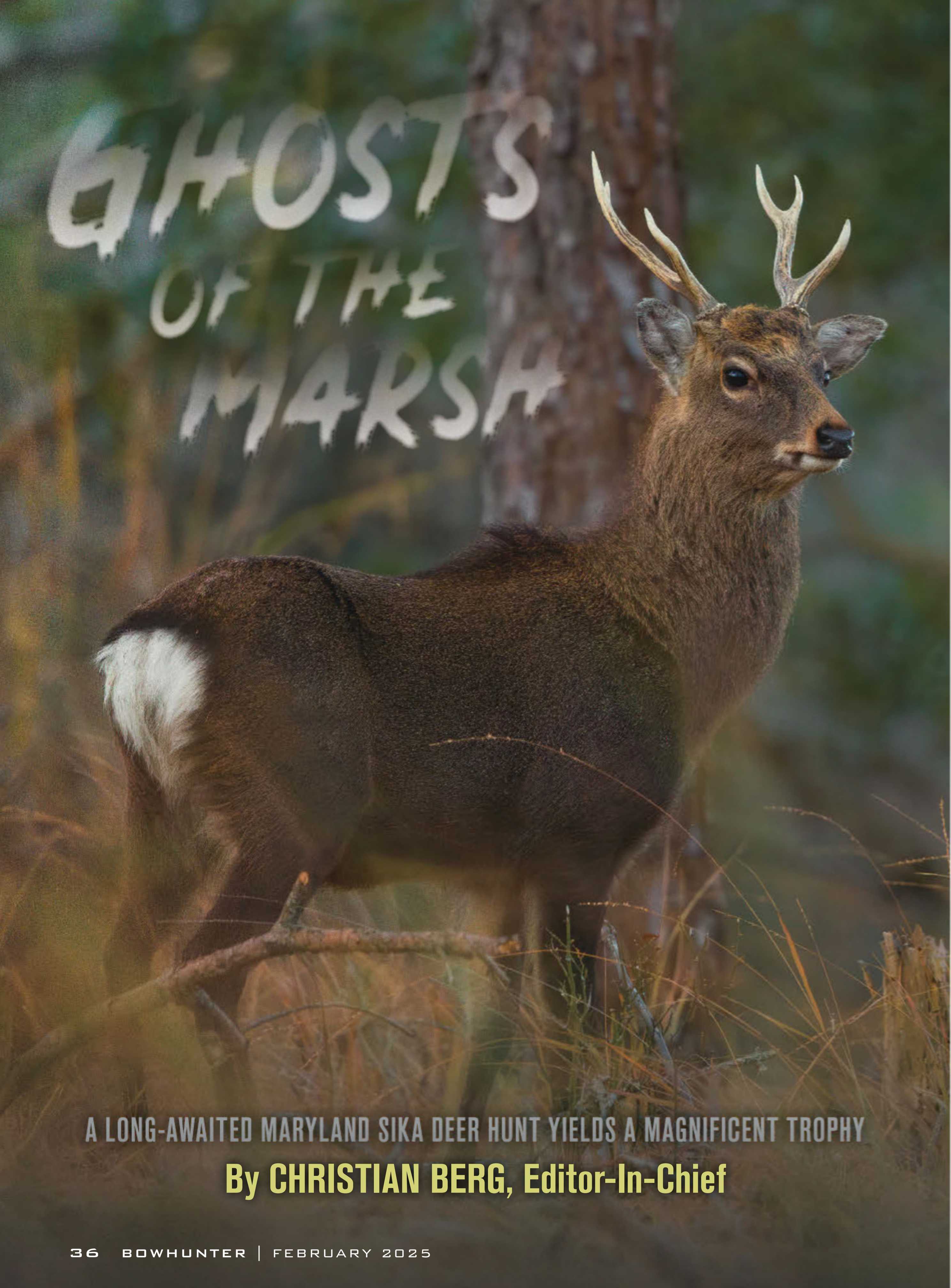


A LONG-AWAITED MARYLAND SIKA DEER HUNT YIELDS A MAGNIFICENT TROPHY

By CHRISTIAN BERG, Editor-In-Chief

SHADOWS lengthened across the swamp as the sun inched toward the western horizon. It was the final evening of my quest for a Maryland sika deer stag, and I could almost hear the clock ticking in my head as I anxiously scanned the flooded timber around my stand while precious minutes of shooting light slipped away.

Then, just like that, the stag appeared. Earlier that afternoon, a pair of sika hinds and an immature stag had approached from my right, splashing through the water as they closed in, giving me plenty of time to handle my bow and get ready before they emerged from the thick brush and marsh grass surrounding my perch. This encounter was completely different, and as my eyes burned a hole through the mature, 6-point stag as golden light from the setting sun silhouetted its body, I fully appreciated why the elusive sika is so often referred to as "the ghost of the marsh."

Though not large by whitetail standards — either in body or antler size — this stag was a relative giant by sika standards, and even a novice marsh hunter like me knew instantly this was the opportunity I came for. As the stag stood on a hump of dry ground and stared intently in my direction, I did my best to settle my nerves and focus on making the shot I desperately hoped would happen. The only question was, would the stag standing some 80 yards to my northwest make it into bow range before nightfall?

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

It's no exaggeration to say my encounter with that sika stag was a long time in coming. I've worked in the hunting industry for more than two decades, and as a Pennsylvania resident who lives just a 3.5-hour drive from the sika deer territory on Maryland's Eastern Shore, a hunt for these diminutive deer has long been on my "bucket list." Yet, for whatever reason, other hunts always seemed to take precedence, and I spent years chasing everything from rutting Iowa whitetails and Montana pronghorns to New Mexico elk and even New Zealand red stags without devoting a single day afield to this unique bowhunting opportunity that is practically in my own backyard.

Thankfully, that finally changed in December 2023 when TJ Jenkins, owner of Muddy Marsh Outfitters, called Associate Editor Mark Demko to let us know that he had a rare cancellation hunt and wondered whether the **Bowhunter** crew wanted it. Mark and I jumped at the opportunity, and with a three-day hunt scheduled for Dec. 18-20, we threw our bows and hunting gear into the truck and headed south with high hopes for an early Christmas celebration.

While my wait to chase sika deer lasted roughly 20 years, the history of sika deer in Maryland stretches back more than a century. The sika (pronounced SEE-kuh) found there are native to Japan and were released on James Island in 1916. The sikas proved well suited to the marshlands surrounding the Chesapeake Bay and established a thriving population that today inhabits the southernmost five counties of Maryland's Eastern Shore, with the greatest concentration being found in the southern portion of Dorchester County. A separate population of sika deer can also be found on Maryland's Assateague Island, where deer were released in the 1920s.

During the 2023-24 deer seasons, Maryland hunters took a total of 4,106 sika deer (1,912 antlered, 2,194 antlerless). Of those, roughly 89 percent were taken in Dorchester County, which is the only county in Maryland where hunters kill more sika deer than whitetails annually. It is also where Muddy

Native to Japan, the wild, free-ranging sika deer of Maryland's Eastern Shore are like miniature elk that offer visiting archers a truly unique bowhunting opportunity. A mature stag such as the one on the left typically weighs no more than 90-100 pounds. Sika females, called hinds, typically weigh 45-50 pounds and bear a single fawn each spring.

SIKA DEER PHOTOS: MICHAEL RICKARD

Marsh Outfitters guides archery-only hunts on roughly 2,000 acres of private ground.

MINIATURE ELK

Though referred to as deer, sikas are more closely related to elk and behave much like miniature versions of their bigger, better-known and more widely distributed cousins. Sika deer have a defined rut that peaks in mid-October, and like elk, rutting sika stags make a bugling sound, or what Jenkins refers to as a whistle, to announce their presence.

"It's higher pitched than an elk," Jenkins said. "You don't get the really deep bugle, but you still get the guttural growl."

If you are ever fortunate enough to be sitting in a blind or stand in the marsh when a nearby stag sounds off, I can assure you it is an exhilarating moment that will make the hair on the back of your neck stand on end.

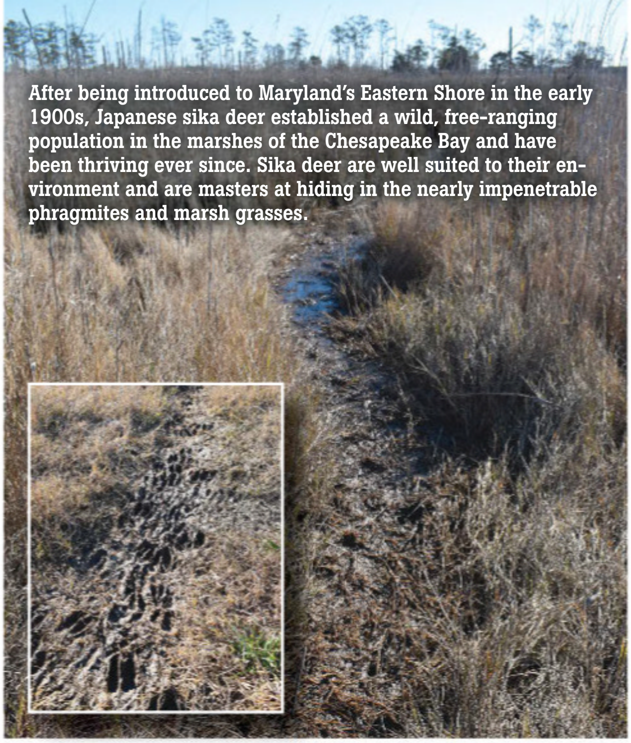
Stags also wallow like elk and are known to travel great distances in search of estrous hinds (females). "You can't pattern them like whitetails," said Jenkins, who has been guiding sika hunters for the past 30 years. "You might see a stag on this piece of property today, and you might see him tomorrow or the next day or you might never see him again."

Featuring darker coats and significantly smaller bodies than whitetails, a mature sika deer stands roughly 2.5 feet tall at the rump. Mature hinds typically weigh 45-50 pounds, with stags in the 60-80-pound range. "If you start getting up to 90 or 100 pounds, that's a big sika," Jenkins said.

Sika deer maintain white spots, mainly running down either side of the back, throughout their lives, and males feature darker coats than females, with longer manes on the neck and chest, again similar to elk.

As for antlers, a mature sika stag sports a 6-point rack (three on each side) that features an eye guard along with a main beam that branches near the top. To help you understand just how much smaller sika antlers are compared to whitetails, consider this: any sika stag that measures more than 50 inches is considered a true trophy, while Maryland's No. 1 all-time sika stag logged an official net score of 77⅛ inches. By comparison, the state's all-time record typical whitetail scored 194$\frac{6}{8}$, while the all-time non-typical scored 268⅛.

Despite their diminutive size, sika deer are quite charismatic, and the unique opportunity to hunt them in marshland habitat where they can seemingly appear and vanish at will makes them more than worthy of pursuit. Jenkins typically books his hunts a year or more in advance and said demand has increased dramatically in recent years as more and more out-of-state hunters become aware of the opportunity.



After being introduced to Maryland's Eastern Shore in the early 1900s, Japanese sika deer established a wild, free-ranging population in the marshes of the Chesapeake Bay and have been thriving ever since. Sika deer are well suited to their environment and are masters at hiding in the nearly impenetrable phragmites and marsh grasses.

"This is supposedly the only place in the world where you can legally hunt this [sika] subspecies in the wild," said Jenkins, who limits clients to archery tackle as a way to limit hunting pressure and help hold more sikas on his carefully managed properties.

"People who have elk hunted know you can push an elk for miles, and this is the same way, I believe, with sika deer. If they are pressured hard and they go somewhere else and keep getting pressured, they'll just spread out from there."

As for the specific advice he offers his bowhunting clients, Jenkins says sikas possess lightning-quick reflexes and are notorious for "jumping the string," ducking down to load their legs to flee at the sound of the bow, often allowing them to avoid an arrow altogether. As a result, Jenkins tells his hunters to aim just behind the front leg, about three inches up from the bottom of the body.

"I have had people video them where they almost laid down on the ground before the arrow got there," Jenkins said. "The average shot here is about 18 yards, and even at 15 yards they'll jump a string. I tell people to aim low, and then if the deer does juke, you'll have a better chance of hitting the top of the lungs. And if it doesn't, you'll blow the heart out."

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Jenkins' sage advice brings us back to where we started, with the big, 6-point stag lurking in the swamp. I held motion-

Listen to Our Sika Deer Podcast

If you want even more in-depth information about Maryland's wild sika deer and how to hunt them, check out our Jan. 2, 2024, podcast episode, Ghosts of the Marsh. Stream or download it today at **bowhunting.podbean.com/e/ghosts-of-the-marsh/.**

THE Bowhunter PODCAST

Hunters at Muddy Marsh hunt from a variety of treestands and ground blinds. A good pair of rubber boots is a must when walking to and from your hunting area!

less as the beast carefully studied the area for several minutes before deciding it was safe to proceed. Slowly coming to my feet and shifting into shooting position, I waited until the stag's head went behind a clump of trees to come to full draw and prepare for the anticipated 24-yard shot.

With the stag now standing in about 10 inches of water, I settled my sight pin on its chest, carefully following Jenkins' instructions to aim a bit lower on the body, and sent the arrow on its way. Pandemonium ensued with the *thwack* of my arrow's impact, causing the stag to splash furiously through the stained swamp water and out of sight. Listening intently in an effort to follow the escape, the splashing continued as the stag veered to the right, circled back in my direction and then seemingly fell, thrashing, back down into the water roughly 80 yards right of the ladder stand.

Suddenly, all was silent, the quiet indicating a successful conclusion to my sika safari. Gathering myself, both mentally and physically, I managed to tap out a text to Jenkins before slowly packing my gear, lowering my bow and awaiting his arrival. Had that really just happened?

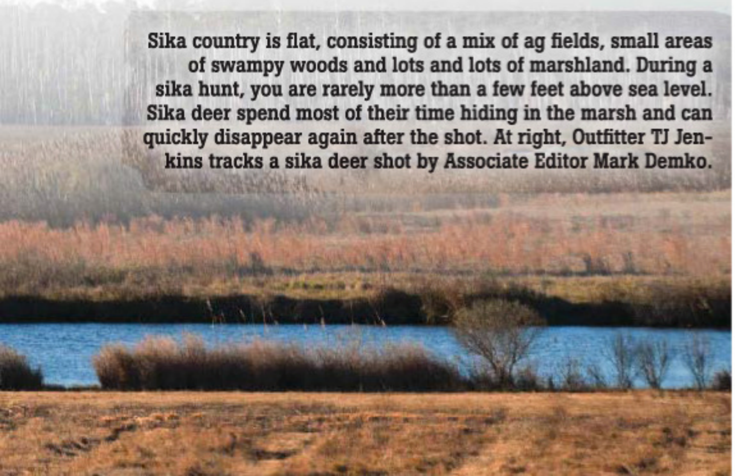
About 30 minutes later, I heard the engine of an ATV, then saw the headlights and heard the sloshing of the wheels pushing through the swamp. After climbing down from the stand, I walked Jenkins and guide Joe Magrogan over to where the stag stood when I shot. My arrow was completely submerged in the water, the broadhead buried in mud. I assumed a pass-through shot, but reaching below the surface and retrieving my arrow, it appeared to have been washed clean.

Fortunately, we could follow the stag's escape path by the disturbed water, and Jenkins looked intently on clumps of marsh grass along the way to find small specks of blood. Knowing generally where I heard the stag crash certainly helped, and it wasn't long before we were standing over the expired animal, allowing me to put my hands on the antlers for the first time. Amazingly, despite aiming low according to Jenkins' instructions, my arrow had hit the stag near the base of the neck — proving yet again how quickly these animals can respond to the sound of the shot. Thankfully, the Rage broadhead found a major artery with its 2-inch cutting diameter and did its lethal job in seconds.

Honestly, as a whitetail hunter who has taken quite a few mature, Midwestern bucks, the stag seemed small to me. But as we grabbed the hind legs and began dragging it through the water back toward the ATV, Jenkins assured me this was a true trophy and likely at least 7 or 8 years old.

"You don't know what you've just done," he proclaimed. "Many locals hunt sika deer their whole lives and never kill a stag like this!"

Considering I'd also taken a sika hind while hunting from a ground blind on the first night of my hunt, and that Mark took a hind of his own on night two, we were very blessed indeed to be headed back to Pennsylvania with three sika deer, including a trophy stag, along with a pile of the best venison you'll ever eat.



Sika country is flat, consisting of a mix of ag fields, small areas of swampy woods and lots and lots of marshland. During a sika hunt, you are rarely more than a few feet above sea level. Sika deer spend most of their time hiding in the marsh and can quickly disappear again after the shot. At right, Outfitter TJ Jenkins tracks a sika deer shot by Associate Editor Mark Demko.

I took this fine sika stag during a December 2023 hunt with Muddy Marsh Outfitters. It was a long time in coming, but well worth the wait! Associate Editor Mark Demko (bottom left) and I were fortunate to each tag a sika hind during our three-day hunt.

"You have been fortunate and had some good luck," Jenkins said. "I've had guys come and hunt with me two or three times and not even see one, and guys like you come for the first time and kill several."

Just as we hoped, Christmas had indeed come "early," even if it did take me 20 years to finally go to Maryland and discover my sika stag gift under the tree! BH

Author's Note: On this hunt, I shot a Mathews Phase 4 outfitted with an Axcel Bridge-Lock bowsight, Ultrarest Integrate MX2 arrow rest, Mathews Bridge-Lock Stabilizer and Easton 5mm FMJ arrows tipped with Rage Hypodermic NC broadheads. I also used a STAN Perfex Resistance release aid and Leupold optics.

PLAN YOUR OWN SIKA HUNT!

Don't repeat my mistake and wait 20 years to hunt Maryland's sika deer! If you've been looking for an affordable and totally different type of bowhunt, these miniature members of the elk family ought to be on your radar. They're cagey, hard to hunt, make a unique trophy and provide some of the best table fare you've ever tasted, making a sika hunt one you'll remember forever.

Although you can tackle a DIY, public-land sika hunt on the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge or the nearby Maryland Department of Natural Resources Taylor's Island and Fishing Bay Wildlife Management Areas, the best bet for traveling bowhunters is a guided hunt with Muddy Marsh Outfitters. Owner TJ Jenkins and his staff have spent the past three decades building this archery-only operation into the Eastern Shore's premier sika-hunting destination by managing their properties to provide quality habitat in tandem with limited hunting pressure.

Muddy Marsh generally offers sika hunts from the Friday after Labor Day through Jan. 31 each year. The daily hunting rate is $350, with a two-day minimum, and includes lodging. Non-resident hunters are also required to possess a Maryland non-resident hunting license ($160), non-resident archery stamp ($25) and non-resident sika deer stamp ($200).

For more information, visit muddymarsh.com or call Jenkins at 410-228-2770.

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IT WAS ABSOLUTELY SURREAL. I was hunkered against a large tire converted into a stock tank situated amidst a sea of open country — an area where I'd previously seen and hunted pronghorns. Two really nice whitetail bucks accompanied by a small buck, does, fawns and — get this — a few mule deer all were feeding about 60 yards away.

The mixed group was completely unaware of the bowhunter hiding in plain sight. Even though the deer and I were both on a Walk-In Area, a fence separated us. Lo and behold, their path would lead them by an open gate through which I could shoot unobstructed.

I desperately hoped they wouldn't cross through the gate, because then they'd be only 10 yards away. Drawing back undetected would be virtually impossible. Plus, they'd easily hit my wind prior to offering a broadside shot. Instead, I hoped they would continue parallel with the fence line. The wind ripped across the prairie at 30 mph. Would I even be able to shoot? I was wound tight with adrenaline coursing through my system.

A young 6-pointer was first to pass the gate opening, and the tall, wide 8-pointer I had my sights set on was next in line. I ranged the young buck at 37 yards as he passed, and then I hooked my release onto the string loop. The opportunity I coveted would unfold in seconds.

BY DARRON MCDOUGAL

THE HUNT BEGINS

I had two deer tags to focus on in November 2022, one of which was a North Dakota tag. My wife, Becca, and I hunted there for about four days until the rifle season opened. I encountered one nice shooter buck with a small drop tine, but he came to the waterhole I was monitoring — temperatures were in the 70s — after legal shooting hours.

The other bucks we saw were very small. Unfortunately, that leg of my North Dakota hunt ended without drawing my bow. However, I returned just before Christmas and arrowed a horse-bodied, 4.5-year-old 7-pointer. This story, though, isn't about that buck.

As we pointed our truck south to focus on my South Dakota tag, I was slightly disappointed yet anticipating a great experience in open country, with the possibility of both mule deer and whitetails. I took a great whitetail buck with a rifle one

MULE DEER TACTICS PROVE EFFECTIVE ON AN OLD PRAIRIE ROAMER

year prior in the area we'd be hunting. While I had my heart set on finding a big mule deer this time, I certainly wouldn't pass up a dandy whitetail.

COVERING GROUND

Because the hunt was in an area with virtually no trees, and because I was hoping to tag a mule deer, I'd be strictly hunting on foot. My wife and I kicked off the hunt by driving around some familiar ground, but we found very few deer where I'd shot my big whitetail the year before; there had been dozens in 2021.

We drove about half an hour to another Walk-In Area that was my number-one spot marked on my HuntStand Pro Whitetail app. We arrived and glassed from the road, but there was little to see. However, the parcel runs a few miles deep, plus it features the occasional change in topography, so we packed some snacks and water and hiked in.

We soon spotted a mature mule deer buck with a dinky rack. He was guarding some does just across the fence on private land. It was not a buck I wanted to harvest on the first day, so we pressed on. We tiptoed up to several different draws and peeked in, but all were empty. Eventually, we reached the back of the property. Across the fence were whitetails, pronghorns and mule deer. Although it was sort of a "field of dreams," there were no big deer, which was fine, because the property is off limits.

Some whitetail does started crossing from the Walk-In Area onto the private land, so we marched in that direction in case any bucks were trailing. After all, it was Nov. 5. When we reached the crossing, we started hiking back toward the truck and covering ground we hadn't during our hike in. Other than some whitetail does and fawns, we spotted a pretty representative muley buck, but he was younger and smaller than the last few I'd taken. So, I let him be.

When we reached the truck, our phones showed we'd hiked 7.5 miles. That was all the effort we had to give, so we headed for our camper. I was slightly discouraged that our big hunt on what I thought was the best ground in the area was fruitless in terms of shooter bucks. I was also discouraged that the bucks we'd seen showed virtually no signs of rutting.

This quality 8-pointer is the result of my spot-and-stalk ploy in the wide-open country of South Dakota in high winds. My wife, Becca, joined me for the recovery, photos and to pack out her share of meat.

PHOTO BY BECCA MCDOUGAL

SPOT-AND-STALK WHITETAILS

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Walk-In programs open thousands of acres in Western states, and some parcels are great for spot-and-stalk whitetail hunting. I shot my buck on this virtually treeless parcel.

The first day of my hunt entailed 7.5 miles of hiking with plenty of deer sightings, yet no shooter buck encounters.

PHOTO BY BECCA MCDOUGAL

A NEW DAY

The following morning, the customary South Dakota winds were rocking our camper when we woke. We brewed coffee and planned to drive around and glass from the truck. The winds were much too stiff to commit to another seven-plus miler, so we'd only leave the truck if we spotted a mature buck.

While driving by a Walk-In Area, we noticed that a shelterbelt near the road was filled with deer. We continued driving and then turned around so we could drive by again. Upon further inspection, a dandy 8-pointer with a tall, wide frame was in the group. As we drove away, he squirted out of the shelterbelt to the north. We couldn't make a move on him, so I planned on checking back that afternoon to see if I could catch him returning to the shelterbelt.

Meanwhile, we drove quite a few miles and eventually spotted a really dandy whitetail bedded down in some trees. He was bedded only yards off a Walk-In Area, so I couldn't stalk him. However, if he moved west, he'd be fair game. I decided to leave him alone. If I returned later and he was still bedded there, I could get out of the truck and make just enough commotion to get him up and running west toward some other trees well within Walk-In boundaries.

GETTING SERIOUS

We arrived back at the camper around noon to eat lunch and regroup. I told Becca I probably wouldn't hunt that afternoon because the winds had intensified. I then checked the forecast and learned the winds wouldn't die down for the remainder of the time we had to hunt before the firearms season opened. Plus, temperatures were going to drop to single digits or colder with the windchill.

"I better go back after one of those two bucks we saw earlier," I said to her as I realized that my dream of finding a big mule deer was dying on the vine. "Come along if you want, but it won't be very enjoyable with the winds."

Wisely, she stayed, but little did she know I'd be calling her 40 minutes later with some news.

I drove toward the Walk-In Area where we'd seen the tall, wide 8-pointer in the shelterbelt. I assumed he'd return after bedding for the day in the only nearby draw. When I reached a vantage point, I immediately spotted him with a massive but short-tined 10-pointer. I was surprised to see them already up and feeding. What I couldn't see were several other deer just over the rise that the bucks were feeding on.

With zero cover — the shelterbelt itself is a designated no-shooting area near structures — I quickly conceived a plan. The large tire that I mentioned earlier is the only cover around. Other than the shelterbelt, everything for hundreds and hundreds of yards in every direction is wide open with shin-high grasses. I drove out of view and parked, then hustled with the wind in my face toward the tire.

When I saw the tire, I sidestepped until it was blocking the deer. Then I realized that there were multiple deer, so I hustled quickly as all of the deer fed. Eventually, I got on my hands and knees and finished crawling to the tire. I peeked over the rubber and the deer were only 60 yards away. I also realized that some muleys were mixed in with the whitetails, and this brings us to where I left off earlier in the story.

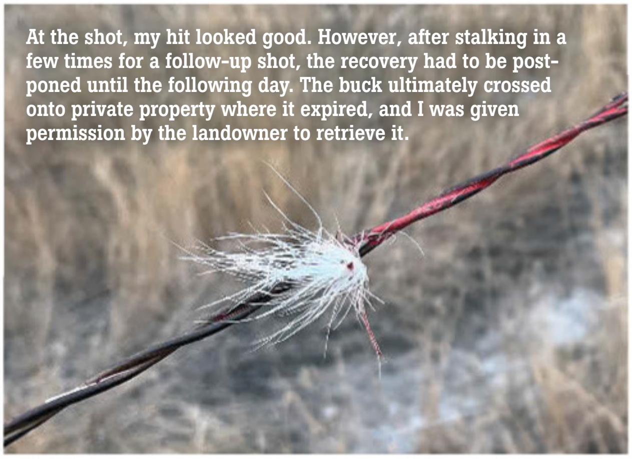
GO TIME

The young 6-pointer was the first to pass by the open gate. The 8-pointer was second in line and fed along parallel with the gate opening. I drew my bow. He stopped naturally and was quartering away; it was then or never. My pins drifted erratically, and I honestly considered letting down and watching my dream fade away. Then, as if a gift from God, the wind decreased just slightly, and I was able to steady up just enough to shoot confidently.

My arrow launched, and I heard and saw it connect. It struck within two inches of where I intended. The buck ran about 125 yards and bedded down. The other big buck circled downwind of him, attempting to determine what was happening. Meanwhile, a doe and fawn from the group walked behind me. With the wind in my favor, they had no clue I was just four yards away.

Suddenly, the landowner pulled up near the shelterbelt on a tractor. That was enough commotion to get my buck up on its hooves. I'd thought he was moments from expiring, since his head was down, so I was alarmed to see him back up. He soon bedded down again. Carefully, I sneaked over to the landowner and explained the situation. He agreed to watch the buck

Just beyond this fence are the buck I eventually took and several other deer, including another big buck and some mule deer. I snapped this photo moments before my buck passed by the gate opening at right.



At the shot, my hit looked good. However, after stalking in a few times for a follow-up shot, the recovery had to be postponed until the following day. The buck ultimately crossed onto private property where it expired, and I was given permission by the landowner to retrieve it.

while I backed out and circled around to approach the deer for a follow-up shot.

Given the openness, I couldn't get very close. I tried circling and cresting a different ridge, but he was still too far away. Then he got up and traveled towards where I'd been just moments earlier. I tried cutting him off, but he caught the movement and altered his course. I was so upset, but I knew the best I could do was exhaust every effort to earn a follow-up shot.

Darkness was looming when I made my final stalk. With three minutes left, I ranged him at 88 yards and was dialing my sight when he stood. I drew back, but he was walking and didn't stop when I grunted. Then darkness swallowed him whole.

LONG, SLEEPLESS NIGHT

Back at the camper, I divulged the entire story to Becca. I assured her the buck would absolutely be dead well before morning based on everything I'd witnessed, including a vivid visual of my arrow placement. The fact that the entire area is wide open, except for a small draw where the deer had bedded that day, also helped our chances. The only problem was that I'd been fairly close to the property line when I'd last seen the buck. I worried he'd crossed the fence, even though he wasn't doing well. Obviously, I didn't sleep well.

The following morning, we drank coffee and bundled up before heading out into the now snowy pasture to begin looking for the buck where I'd left off. We did not see anything initially, so I told Becca, "Let's head straight for the private fence line and look for any indications that he crossed it." There, we found blood and hair on the wires. I went from anxious to more anxious. He'd crossed onto land we couldn't hunt.

I lifted my binos and scanned across the fence through the blowing snow and spotted a lifeless figure covered in snow with an arrow protruding from it. Whew! My buck was down, but we couldn't go get him. So, I made a couple phone calls and got permission to go retrieve the deer. Man, was I relieved.

As we approached the buck, I couldn't help but feel immense remorse. On one hand, I was thankful to fill my tag with a dandy buck, but I so badly wished my hit had been perfect. Bowhunting — even with today's best technologies — isn't easy. Shooting at a big buck is intense, but add in stalking within bow range and being at eye level with about 10 different deer and it becomes more challenging.

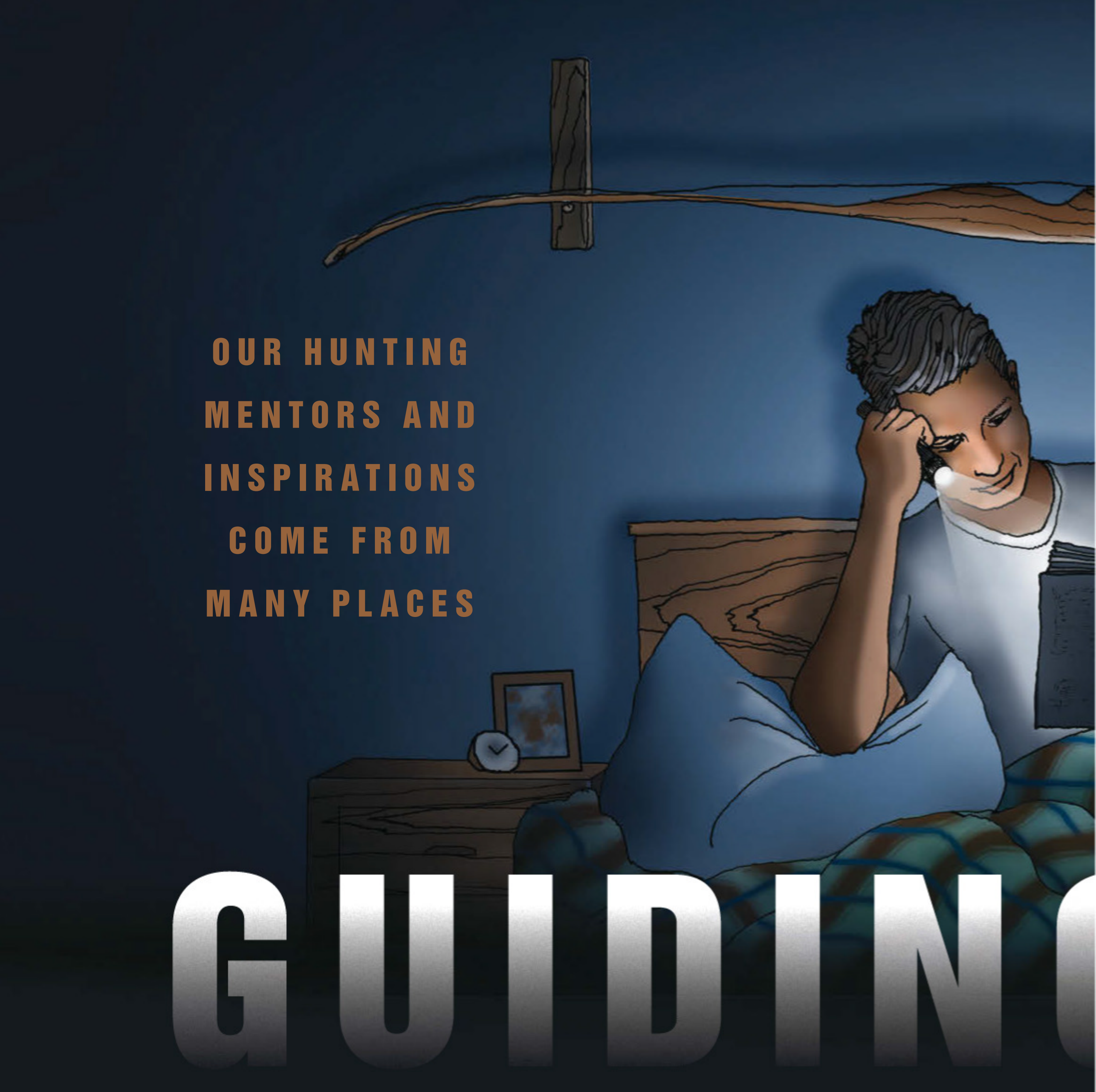
We dragged the deer against a bank in the draw to seek shelter from the howling winds. There, I skinned and quartered him. Afterward, I conducted an autopsy of sorts and found that my arrow had exited slightly low and back from where I thought it would have when I'd taken the shot. It went through the stomach and liver and poked out just behind the heart and beneath the lungs. Had my arrow hit 2-3 inches higher and/or farther forward, he would've died within seconds.

Nevertheless, you can't rewrite history. While I regretted that the hit wasn't perfect, I've bowhunted long enough to know this stuff happens. I had to shake it off and resolve to do better the next time (And I did when I killed my next buck in North Dakota in December).

I boiled the skull back at the camper and removed all of the tissues. I noticed that the teeth were worn more than expected of a 3.5-year-old buck, which is how old I thought he was upon recovering him. After texting some closeup teeth pictures to a biologist friend, he estimated that the buck was 5.5 years old. This buck wasn't my first mature spot-and-stalk whitetail, and Lord willing, it won't be my last. **BH**

The author is a God-fearing man and a full-time freelance outdoor writer. He lives in Wausau, Wisc., with his wife, Becca.

Author's Notes: For this hunt, I used a Mathews V3 27 bow, Easton Archery 6.5 Acu-Carbon arrows, Rage Hypodermic NC broadhead, Sitka Gear clothing, LaCrosse Lodestar boots, Nikon binoculars and a Maven spotting scope. I iced my buck's meat in a YETI Tundra cooler.



OUR HUNTING MENTORS AND INSPIRATIONS COME FROM MANY PLACES

GUIDIN

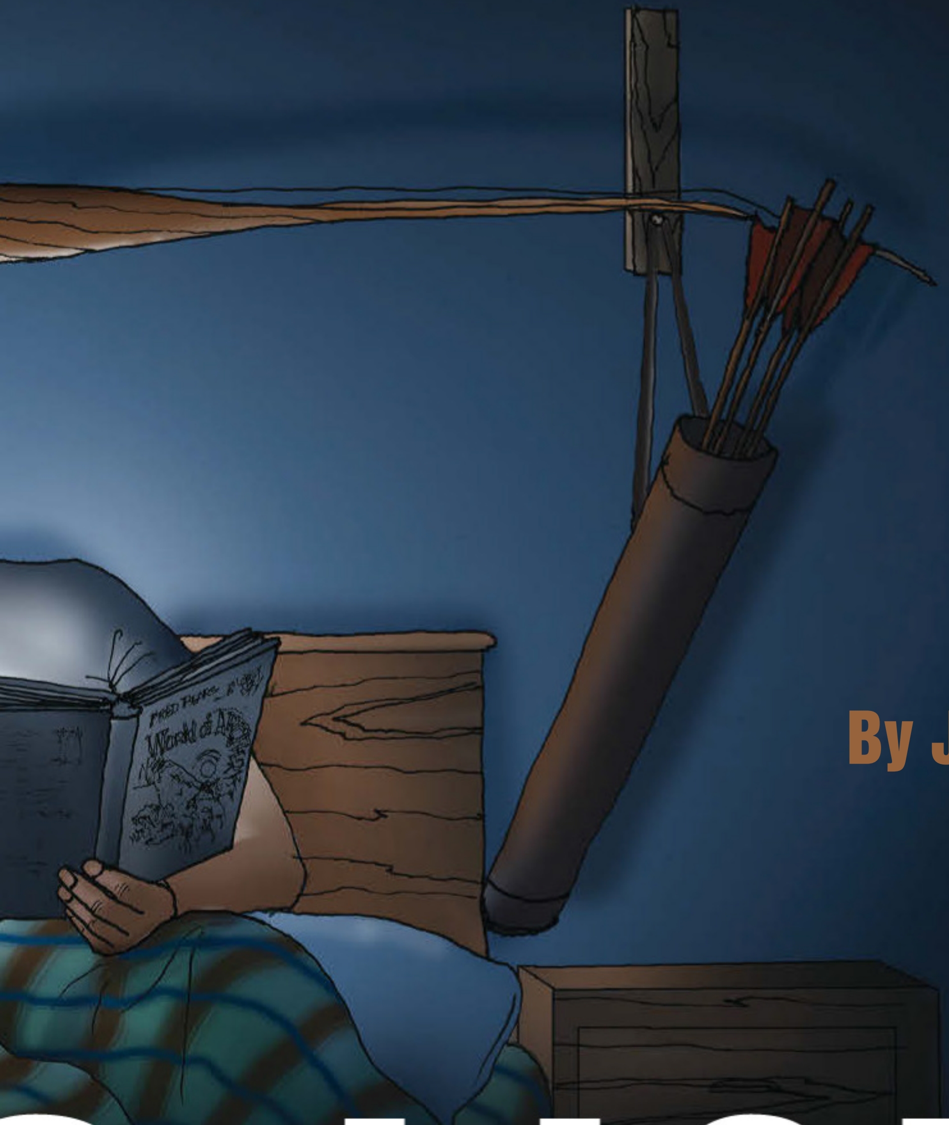
In my 30-plus years of hunting, I have been lucky enough to have some amazing mentors. I can remember going to my family hunting camp when I was young and absolutely worshiping all the guys who were preparing for the hunt. I did my best to absorb their theories and stories of successes and failures from years gone by. I couldn't get enough. The old dusty racks and mounts that adorned those walls did nothing short of whirl me into a frenzy of excitement for the time that would eventually come when I too would lace up those boots, put on some camo and create my own stories.

Along with these tangible mentors, I was also influenced by the many great authors of the time. I cannot count the hours I spent reading magazines and books covering the outdoors. There's no doubt all those stories helped propel this humble outdoorsman into the hunting fanatic I am today, even at age 45.

Mentors can come from anywhere. For example, some people have been inspired by their grade-school teachers, their high-school football coaches or even their older siblings. As a high-school teacher and coach for more than 20 years now, I have learned that some relationships that are struck in the classroom or in the weight room at can bloom into long-lasting friendships and sources of inspiration.

Remembering The GOAT

If you live in Michigan like I do and you're a hunter, you likely have been influenced by Fred Bear. If you are reading



By Jim Bouchard

MARK ANDERSON ILLUSTRATION

G LIGHT

this and have not gone down the Fred Bear rabbit hole, stop reading my words right now and start from scratch. Go pick up one of the many books that provide firsthand stories written by the GOAT himself. Then, when you have completed all of those, pick up all the other books that were written about Fred by his hunting partners. After that, do yourself a favor and watch his original hunting videos. Then, you can pick up this magazine and start again.

I never met Fred Bear and was actually born a little too late to truly get the full display of his glory in his hometown of Grayling, Mich., which is only an hour and a half from my home. By the time I was really interested in hunting, the Fred Bear Museum had headed for warmer temperatures in Florida. However, his films and books lined my shelves later in life and inspired my soul to a whole new level of outdoor adventure.

The incredible, untamed stories that were written in his words and shown in his many films captured my imagination. They also inspired me to think about how a guy who spent most of his life in my home state could be such a legend! These early works are the building blocks of what is now the modern-day hunting media. The hunting world would be nothing without Fred's groundbreaking films and books.

Another Michigan man who had a tremendous influence on this teenaged, pimple-faced boy with a love for the outdoors was Terrible Ted Nugent. Yes, the Motor City Madman.

Love him or hate him, Ted offered a whole new perspective to the outdoors during my teenage years. He was energetic, he oozed rock 'n' roll, and he preached the outdoors no matter what stage he was on. He also preached against drugs and alcohol during a time when most of my companions were drowning in it. Many people look past this part of his message, but it hit home to me when I was at a crossroads in my confusing teenage years.

The other thing that stood out about Ted was that he shot instinctively, just like me. I shot instinctively for almost 20 years before switching over to a bowsight for the first time. The fact that Ted was so successful with the practice only solidified my relatively odd way of doing things. Like Fred Bear, I have never met Ted. I may have watched him on stage several times, but his words and videos provided a mentorship as if he were my next-door neighbor showing me the way when he had a chance.

Pay It Forward

My goal in sharing all this is not to simply list the many mentors I have had — it is to hopefully inspire you all to think about the impact you might have on a fellow hunter, no matter what age they may be. In a world full of endless negativity and poor role models, I think there needs to be a focus on turning things around and becoming better on even the smallest levels. How are you representing yourself with young hunters around you? How are you representing the hunting world with the pictures you share on social media? Are you taking the time to explain things to people who ask or inquire? Are you able to eloquently explain the lifestyle you love so much?

As mentioned earlier, I couldn't get enough of the stories I heard at camp as a child. In fact, I still hope some of my older friends and family members will share particular stories each season, even though I have heard them dozens of times. It's what makes us all united at camp. It's what keeps all the hunters who came before us, and the lessons they taught, alive. I believe this is an aspect of the hunting community that needs to be built up more. Those storytellers make our hunting lifestyle carry on forever.

Having the opportunity to be published in *Petersen's Bowhunting*, and now **Bowhunter**, over the past several years has been extremely rewarding. It is unbelievable to see my words next to those written by legends such as Chuck Adams, M.R. James, Bill Winke, Eddie Claypool and many others. These guys have been filling my ever-eager brain with bowhunting information for years. Reading how they described their many adventures, gear setups, failures and successes made me want to be the best I could be as a bowhunter.

I would love to know how much money I have spent on

THE ADVENTURES OF FRED BEAR
Trailing a Bear
BY ROBERT S. MUNGER
OWHUNTING
RESSURED
HITETAILS

There have been countless books and magazine articles written by some of the best bowhunters around. I got lost in the pages of many of these publications as a kid, and I still do today.

I can remember going to my family hunting camp when I was young and absolutely worshiping all the guys who were preparing for the hunt. This picture from the 2015 deer season shows the family buck pole, facilitated by my Uncle Everette (fourth from left).

magazines in my lifetime. Perusing the magazine racks in the store and seeing the new issue was like Christmas morning. What cool adventure was Eddie going to describe to me? What kind of big-buck knowledge was Bill going to provide, only for me to apply incorrectly to my hunting situation and completely screw it up? What amazing photos was Chuck going to share on his endless journey through archery mastery? Well, now I have the humbling opportunity to be in the same magazine as those guys! I feel like I am pulling a fast one on somebody. Once again, I have never met any of these individuals; however, they have changed my life in many ways.

Today, I try to pass on my love for the outdoors and hunting to my two children, James (on left) and Grace, now 8 and 16. The only way to secure a future in hunting is by providing a wide variety of experiences for new hunters.

Thanks to the time we've spent afield, my daughter Grace now enjoys archery as well as hunting for squirrels and wild turkeys.

Some say print media is a dying medium. Well, don't believe it! Even though there are some amazing advantages to Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, it is simply not the same as the feel and tangible experience that come with having and holding a hunting magazine or book. Sure, the digital pictures and videos you can see on your smartphone screen are awesome — not to mention a great way to let yourself get distracted in a deer stand — having that magazine on the coffee table or in the blind is a whole different experience.

I always had a book or magazine in my backpack at school so I could hurry up and get the ridiculous math work done and then set it aside and read how to tackle the upcoming rut or drool over the advertisements for the new flagship bows. Who needed that math stuff anyway? I was never going to use that later in life. I needed to be focused on how the moon was going to affect the peak of the rut in my area. That was some necessary information to absorb.

Magazines are, of course, now available online, and I get that some people love the easy access to them. However, it is simply not the same scrolling through on a screen after I have spent half the day doing bills, writing lesson plans and answering emails. When that magazine is in my hand, it requires a different focus and harkens me back to reading in my bed as a youngster with the headlamp or flashlight as I wondered what it would be like to actually get to full draw on a decent buck.

Inspiration Lives On

Finding a mentor you can literally share a campfire with is the ultimate goal, but there are so many experts out there that you can learn from. Even when those individuals are miles away or have long since passed, their words and stories can be a bounty of inspiration and knowledge for you. Think about the great musicians in history who have been gone for hundreds of years and still inspire young kids to pick up their instruments today.

I will never be able to thank all of those who have inspired my outdoor pursuits over the years. I know I will never get a chance to meet them, but I hope they understand what they have provided me is going to live on through my words and actions. I also hope that I, in some ways, might be a source of inspiration to those who read these words. It still blows my mind that I have been provided an opportunity to share my thoughts and stories with all the readers, and I don't take the privilege lightly. **BH**

Tthor resides in Northern Michigan with his wife, Jessica, and two children, Grace and James.

On Nov. 2, 2023, I took this nice 8-point buck on a property we have permission to hunt in Bucks County, Pa. Although the property is known to hold good numbers of deer, it's rare to see more than the occasional mature buck on this particular parcel.

FATHER AND SON SCORE FROM SAME TREESTAND DAYS APART

STRIKING

"Whassup?" In a very satisfied tone, that is how my 17-year-old son, Mason, responded to me when I answered his phone call shortly after 4 p.m. on Nov. 6, 2023. I excitedly asked him, "Did you shoot one?" and he quickly replied, "Dad, I got a nice one."

Now, it's a good thing I was alone in my office at the time, because I yelled "Yes!" very loudly. Mason started to tell me a little about the experience, but I told him to wait and that I was on my way to meet him so I could hear the whole story in person. He quickly replied, "OK, hurry up!"

Mason struggled in 2022 to get as much treestand time as he wanted due to early-season basketball practices. In 2023, however, he was determined to invest a serious amount of effort into archery hunting. He chose to continue driving our old car with more than 225,000 miles on it so he could use some of the money he had been saving from his job at a local farm to purchase a brand-new Mathews V3X.

My son fitted out his new bow nicely and spent many hours on the archery range at our home. He and I also invested significant time in stand preparation last year. Archery sea-

Only four days after I took my buck, my son Mason scored on this non-typical 10-pointer from the same treestand. The story is especially notable since it's the first time we have both connected on bucks with our bows in the same season.

GOLD

By KEN PAUL

son in our area of southeastern Pennsylvania starts in mid-September — two weeks earlier than the rest of the state — and we had been out in early August hanging stands, clearing shooting lanes and creating access to our stand sites.

Early-Season Encounters

Mason and I were both fortunate to harvest a doe early in the season, and we hunted consistently over the next month, keeping our eyes open for a shooter buck willing to show himself prior to the start of the rut. We each came close to filling another doe tag a couple more times, but the right shot did not present itself. As is often the case in October, we had not been seeing a great deal of buck activity on the properties we hunt. The temperatures had been warm, and even the doe activity was minimal. However, my two daughters, Mason and I continued to get as much stand time as our work and school schedules allowed.

At one of the properties we hunt, there was a significant amount of standing corn still up on the neighboring properties, and we believe that was contributing to the lack of deer sightings in the timber. On the evening of Oct. 26, my daughter

Elyse and Mason went to hunt a spot closer to our house, while I went to the property where the corn was still standing.

I arrived at the property to hear the sound of the combine harvesting the cornfields, and I was excited to see what that would do for deer activity in the timber. It was a warm evening, and after getting into my stand I sat down to cool down from my walk in. I soon heard a faint sound behind me and turned around to see a very nice buck with a doe already in range. I quickly stood up, grabbed my bow and looked for a shooting lane. As hard as I tried, I could not find a clear shot to the buck's chest through the brush they were standing in. I then watched him push the doe around in the thick brush for the next hour or so. I tried to aggravate him with some grunting and snort-wheeze calls, hoping to provoke his territorial instincts, but to no avail.

The Action Heats Up

Over the next couple of days, the temperatures started dropping, just as we hoped would happen as we closed in on the rut. On the evening of Nov. 2, Mason and I headed back to the property where I saw the shooter the prior week. We typically see more deer activity in our creek bottom stand, where I saw the buck the week before. So, I suggested Mason sit that stand, and I would sit the stand in the middle of the property.

Soon thereafter, we both climbed into our stands and got settled. As the evening progressed, I began to see more and more activity from my stand. I had does milling around eating acorns, while some smaller bucks started cruising through in search of does. I also heard the telltale sounds of a buck chasing a doe through the thick brush above my stand, but I never laid eyes on that buck.

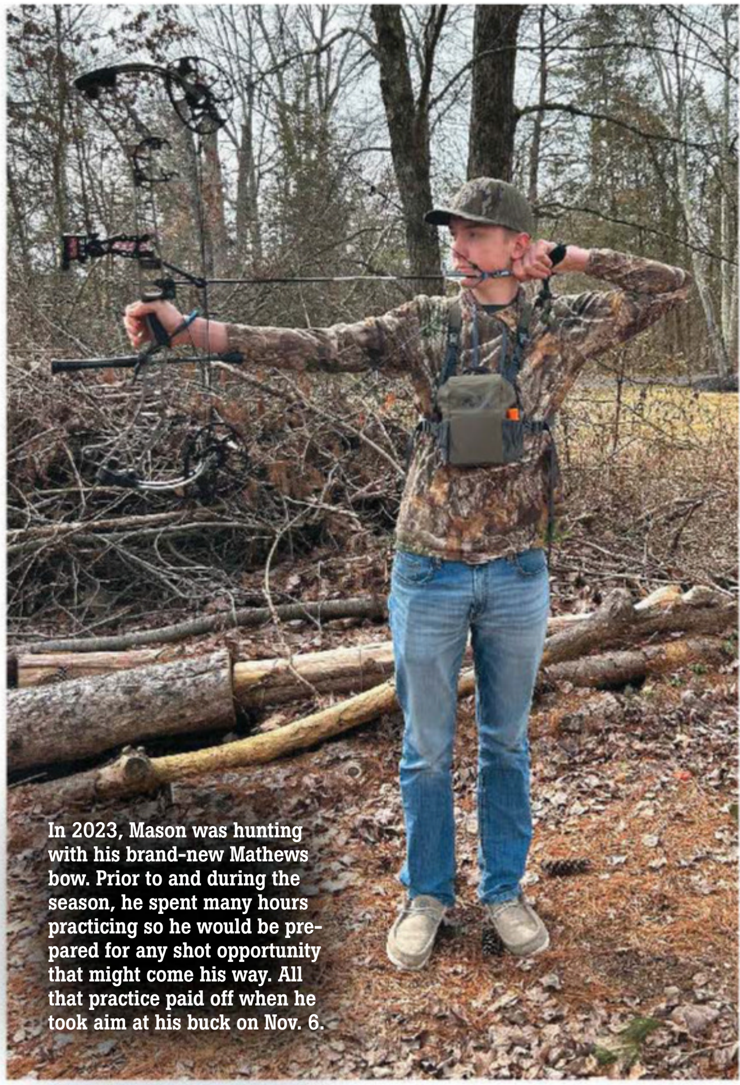
Daylight was quickly fading and I had about five minutes of legal shooting light left. My thoughts had already turned towards packing up when I looked up and saw a big-bodied deer walking at a fast pace about 40 or 50 yards in front of me. He was moving through some brush, but I saw enough of his headgear to know that if given the chance, I would be more than happy to take him.

I quickly grabbed my bow and turned in the direction he was headed. I did not have a clear shot and he was quickly heading out of range. I knew my time was limited, so I grabbed my grunt call and gave two soft grunts with my call pointed to the side of my tree opposite of where the buck was. He came to a brief stop, turned 90 degrees and started walking directly towards me. Everything happened fast and I had to execute a quick shot when he was about 4-5 yards from the bottom of my tree.

When I triggered my release, the buck lurched forward about two yards and collapsed beneath my stand. He was thrashing about, so I quickly grabbed another arrow thinking I might need a follow-up shot, but his movement quickly started to slow, and I knew he was about to expire. The entire experience took about three or four minutes — it is always amazing to me how quickly events can unfold in the whitetail woods.

With my bow still in my hand, I called Mason. He immediately asked if I shot one, to which I replied, "Yes." He then said he heard the deer crash from his stand.

Our stands are probably about 70 yards apart, but we cannot see each other. Mason told me he would pack up his stuff and come over, so I waited until he got there before I looked closely at the buck. Mason picked the deer's head up and said, "What a toad!" It's funny how words are used — I believe that's the slang term some like to use to describe a nice buck these days.

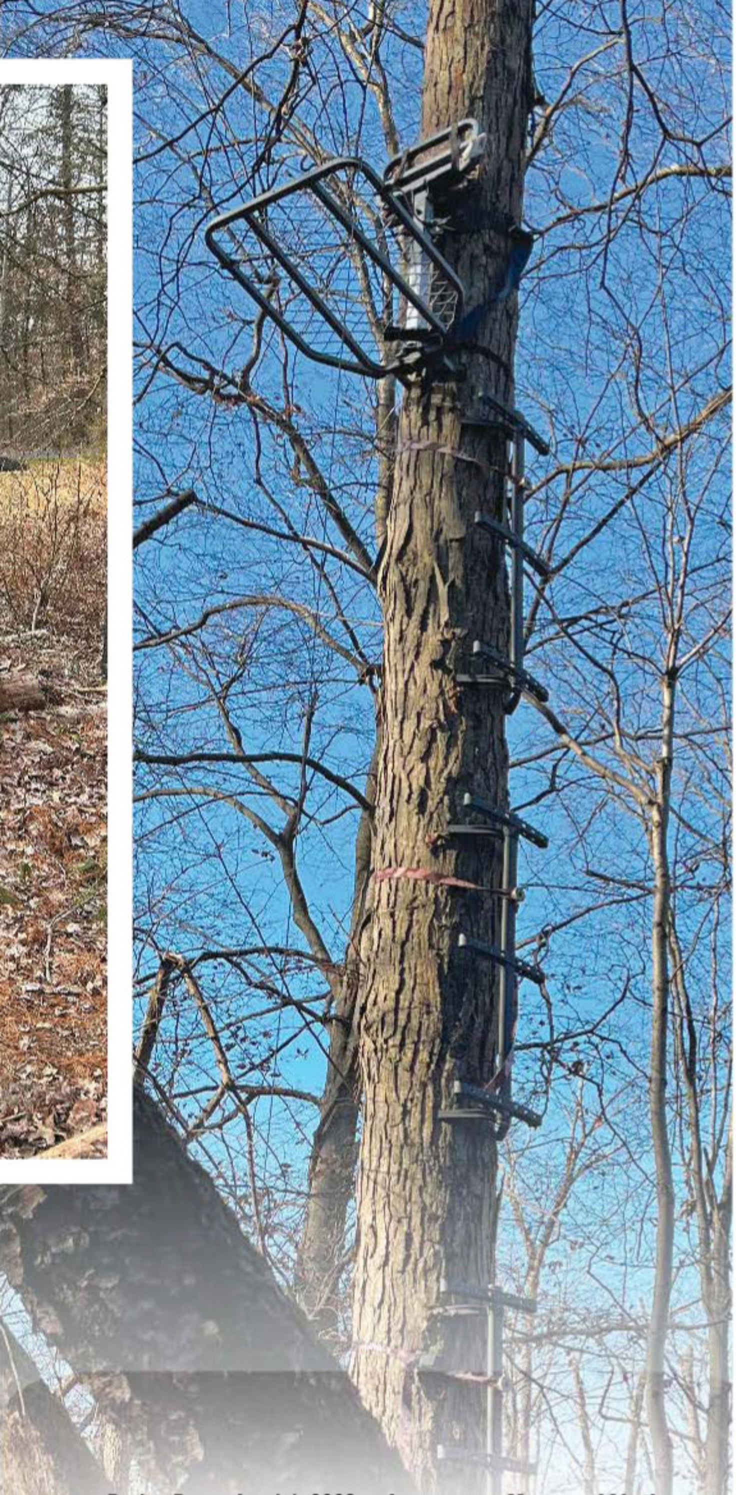

In 2023, Mason was hunting with his brand-new Mathews bow. Prior to and during the season, he spent many hours practicing so he would be prepared for any shot opportunity that might come his way. All that practice paid off when he took aim at his buck on Nov. 6.

The two of us then went through our normal routine of picking a spot, clearing some of the weeds and positioning the buck for some good pictures. As we celebrated in the light of our headlamps, I told Mason that we had to get the deer out of there and that he should plan on coming back to hunt the spot. There were plenty of does around, and more bucks would be cruising over the next few days.

Going Solo

Mason's next available time to hunt was that Saturday morning, and he decided to sit in the same stand I had due to the heavy activity we were experiencing through the center funnel on the property. His morning started slowly, with only one small buck and a couple of does sighted, but around mid-morning he heard some crashing up on the hill in front of him. Mason looked up to see a big buck dogging a doe so hard that the doe almost fell over at one point.

Mason grabbed his bow in preparation for a shot and the buck started chasing the doe towards him. They quickly came into range and Mason started bleating loudly with his mouth while at full draw to try and get the buck to stop. The buck slid to a brief stop at 15 yards with a bush completely blocking his vitals. Mason told me later that, "One step back or one



During Pennsylvania's 2023 archery season, Mason and I both scored on bucks from this treestand only four days apart. It was a memory we'll both cherish the rest of our lives.

step forward and I would have had a perfectly clear shot." The buck, however, went from his standing position to a full sprint after the doe, never offering a shot. They were gone as quickly as they had appeared.

Amazingly, that wasn't the end of the excitement. Following behind the big buck were four more bucks coming single file down the hill on the same trail that the buck and doe had just come through on. I asked Mason if any of those four were shooters and he told me the last one was borderline, but he was still hoping the bigger buck would chase the doe back through again. So, he decided to wait.

Although Mason was not able to hang a tag on a buck that morning, it was clear from the way he told the story that it was one of the most memorable hunts he had had so far. I asked my son how big the big buck was and he said, "I am not sure how many points, but, Dad, it was definitely bigger than yours!"

Mason was now committed. The weather was cold, the rut was picking up and he had one more week to hunt hard before mandatory basketball practices began. My son finishes school early on Mondays, so on the afternoon of Monday, Nov. 6, he was back in the same stand with high hopes of seeing the same buck or another nice buck cruising through.

The evening started slowly, with only some doe sightings. So, a little before 4 p.m., Mason decided to do some rattling. A few minutes after he finished a rattling sequence, a small yearling came in and started eating acorns about 20 yards in front of him. Mason was watching the yearling when the deer quickly lifted its head to attention and stared intently in the direction of the creek bottom.

Mason looked and saw a large-bodied deer moving in his direction through the brush. The deer lifted its head and Mason immediately knew it was a shooter. Within seconds, the buck was passing by on his right, only a few yards from his tree. Mason let him walk past so the buck would not notice the movement of him drawing his bow.

After Mason came to full draw, the buck stopped broadside at 10 yards and looked at the yearling. Mason knew he should aim slightly low due to the shot angle on a close shot like that. All his hours practicing with his new bow paid off, and he executed a perfect shot. The G5 Megameat broadhead did the job well, causing a short but massive blood trail as the buck did a semicircular run in front of Mason before faltering and tipping over only seconds after the shot.

Making Memories

Getting back to the beginning of this story, I got to Mason's location as quickly as I could to hear him excitedly tell the story in detail. Elyse met us at the property as well so we could all celebrate this awesome moment with him. The Lord rewarded Mason's hard work and persistence with a very beautiful and unique Pennsylvania 10-pointer.

The right side was typical and carried 5 points. The left side carried 5 points as well; however, it was quite different in appearance. That side was a typical 4-point frame but sat much higher off the buck's head, with a wild, 15-inch G2 that had a 1.5-inch kicker on the front. We soaked in the moment as we went through our photo process to preserve the memory for Mason.

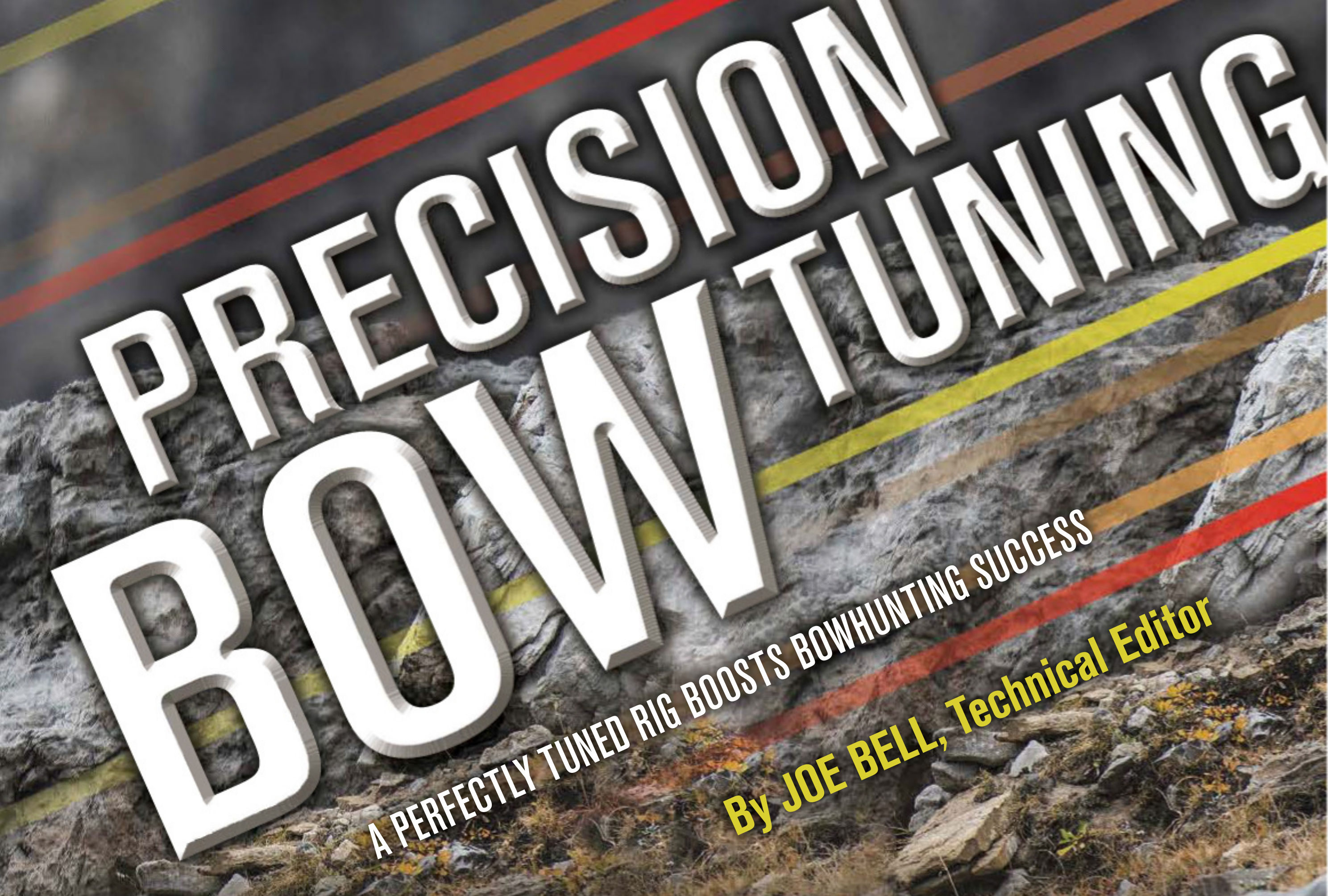
As I write this, almost two months have passed. However, Mason and I are still riding high on the blessings we got to experience by striking gold twice from the same stand within four days of one other. **BH**

The author resides in Pennsburg, Pa., with his wife, Cindy, and enjoys all things related to the outdoors, especially hunting with their three children, Kaylee, Elyse and Mason.

Author's Notes: For my hunt, I used a Hoyt Pro Defiant 34 bow, Easton Axis arrows, Rage broadheads, Carter hinge release, Fuse Archery quiver, IQ Bowsight, Leupold rangefinder and Realtree camo clothing. My son, Mason, used a Mathews V3X bow, G5 arrows, G5 Megameat broadheads, Tru-Fire release, TruGlo bowsight and Cabela's rangefinder and camo.

Don't short-change your bow-tuning process. Small tweaks here and there can yield a lot of extra shooting forgiveness and accuracy — just what you need to boost your bowhunting confidence!

PHOTO COURTESY OF HOYT ARCHERY



PRECISION BOW TUNING

A PERFECTLY TUNED RIG BOOSTS BOWHUNTING SUCCESS

By JOE BELL, Technical Editor

NERVES ON EDGE, I sat motionless in my treestand. After waiting most of the day, it was now primetime, and several Coues deer began shuffling out of the woodwork. Most were does, but there were two bucks in the mix. After two days of getting busted from my ground blind setup, I switched it up and positioned my lightest, most compact stand further away from the remote waterhole I was hunting in hopes of avoiding the superb eyes, ears and noses of these ghost-like creatures. The tradeoff was a potentially longer-than-average shot if I was fortunate to get an opportunity.

Two does drank from the water's edge, but the bucks hung back in the shadows. There were maybe 15 minutes of shooting light remaining, and I felt my odds dwindle with every second that passed.

Then, one of the bucks simply materialized. I never saw or heard him, but there he was, broadside at 42 yards. I drew slowly and settled the 40-yard pin dead center on his lungs. Despite an intense adrenaline rush, I held solidly and waited for the shot to break. Soon, I saw the flash of an arrow bisect my aiming spot perfectly. The buck bolted but fell a short distance away. I couldn't believe it; what an intense, dream-like moment, followed by an amazingly quick kill.

By no means is a shot like that a chip shot, especially when bundled up in layers of cold-weather gear. But when your bow is consistently spitting tight groups with fixed-blade broadheads, it gives you confidence to act fast and deliver with precision. With that in mind, here's a proven plan for dialing in your bow. Follow these steps and you'll be amazed at the results.

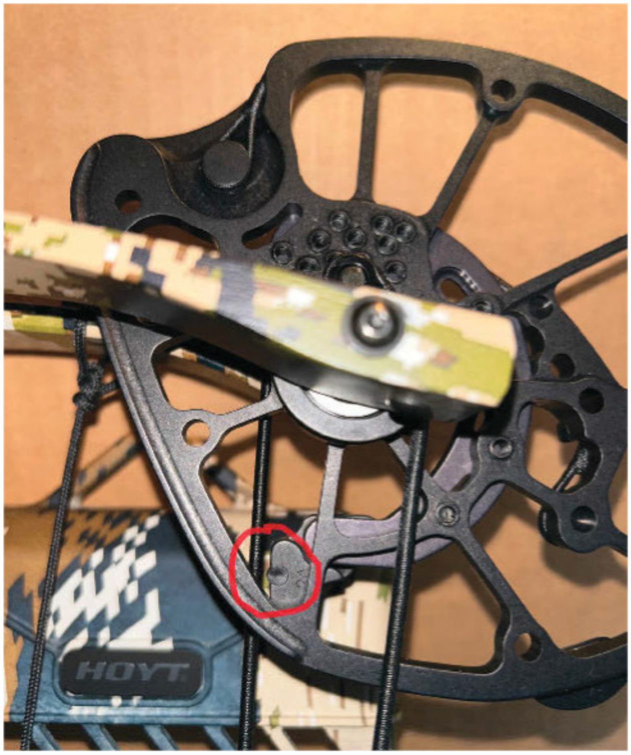
CAM TUNING

When I get a new bow or need to retune an old one after replacing a bowstring or arrow rest, the first thing I do is examine the cam system to ensure perfect timing. In other words, each cam should rotate in unison, so the draw-stop pegs collide with the cables or limbs at *exactly the same time*. This is crucial to ensuring the arrow cycles smoothly and remains in the vertical center path of the bowstring as it launches.

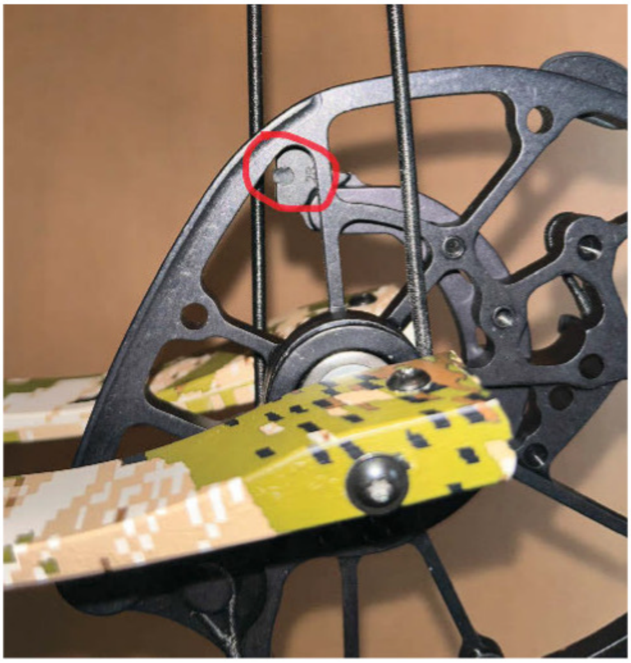
There are two ways to check cam synchronization. One is to draw the bow back slowly while a friend looks at each cam's roll-over position. With this method, there can be a lot of trial and error, but it works relatively well.

The second method, and the one I use, is to use a bow-drawing device, such as the Last Chance Draw Board. The draw board allows you to draw the bow back very slowly as you turn a locking crank. You can move back and forth slowly as you examine cam orientation and how the draw stops impact the cables/limbs. The process is extremely precise, so you can dial in cam settings exactly.

To fix improper cam rotation, *start by adding twists to the buss cable that strikes the draw stop first*. Of course, you'll need to press the bow and pull the buss cable out from the string peg located on the side of the cam. To begin, add one full twist to the harness. This will reduce the cam's string intake, bringing it closer in line with the other cam. Once you add the twist(s), reset the cable and un-press the bow carefully, then repeat the process as needed.



To operate properly, a bow's top (above) and bottom (below) cams must rotate in perfect unison, with the draw stops reaching the cables and/or limbs at exactly the same time. If you don't have a draw board to check cam timing yourself, you can do it with a friend by having one person slowly draw the bow while the other watches cam rotation for any inconsistencies.



SET CENTER SHOT AND ARROW HEIGHT

Center shot is important because it places the arrow directly behind the center of the bowstring, allowing the arrow to be pushed straight forward upon string release. You can "eyeball" the center shot by visually aligning the arrow with the bowstring and string grooves in the cams. To do this, place an arrow on the bowstring, hold the bow out at arm's length while resting the bottom cam on a table or your leg, then line everything up. When everything is aligned correctly, the arrow should be dead center with the bowstring and the cam's string grooves. If not, adjust the arrow rest left or right until the correct alignment is found.

Note: If you notice each string groove is slightly off-center when lining up the bowstring (i.e., top cam vs. bottom cam), then place the bowstring between the grooves or slightly left of center of the bow's grip when using a right-hand bow (opposite for a left-hand bow.) In most cases, center shot will be .625-inch to 1-inch out from the threaded rest-mounting hole in the bow riser to the centerline of the arrow.

The next step is to adjust the height of the arrow rest and nocking loop so the arrow sits at a 90-degree angle to the bowstring. Generally, you want to adjust rest height so that your arrow is centered with the threaded rest-mounting hole in the bow riser. You can then adjust your nocking loop as needed. A small bubble level can be a helpful tool during this step. I find that putting the nocking loop at a height where the arrow is square to .0625-inch above square is a good position to begin tuning.

ADJUSTING DRAW LENGTH AND WEIGHT

I consider ensuring that your draw length is set just right, based on the nocking loop length and release aid you're using, one of the most important steps in bow tuning. Remember, you can micro-tune draw length by twisting or untwisting the bowstring a couple times to shorten or lengthen your draw length. You can also change draw length by altering the length of the nocking loop.

Many of today's new cam systems have built-in micro-adjust settings. For example, Hoyt's new HBX Xact Cams allow for half- or quarter-inch changes in draw length — making small draw adjustments a breeze.

With draw weight, never overdo it. Try shooting a paper plate at 15 yards while sitting down. If you can't hold your 20-yard sight pin on the paper plate while drawing and aiming, you're probably overbowed. Reduce draw weight until you can draw smoothly and remain fully in control from this seated position.

After making draw-length and/or draw-weight adjustments, shoot the bow several times. Then, re-check the positioning of the cams, since altering the weight-adjustment bolts can potentially change cam timing.

BEGIN ARROW TUNING

With the bow now set, begin paper tuning. For this step, use a dedicated paper-tuning rack or a simple cardboard box or sheet of plywood with a large hole cut in it. I like to use painter's paper for paper tuning, stretched tightly across the opening using clamps, tape or staples.

Position the paper-holding device several feet in front of the target, so the arrow can exit the paper fully before impact. The paper should be perpendicular to you and high enough that you can shoot straight into it — not at a downward angle. From about 6 feet away, shoot an arrow through the paper and

I believe having your draw length set just right is critical for top accuracy. Most of today's top bows feature cam systems that allow you to easily adjust draw length in increments as small as a quarter inch. And you can make even finer adjustments by adding/removing twists in your bowstring and/or adjusting the length of your nocking loop.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MATHEWS

examine the tear. The goal is to tune the flight of the arrow so it creates a "bullet hole" tear, showing only the footprint of the shaft and vanes and nothing else.

I like to begin paper tuning using an arrow without fletching. I wrap about three inches of electrical tape around the shaft where the vanes usually glue on. The weight of the tape will produce the same front-of-center balance as a fletched arrow. With an unfletched arrow, you eliminate the chance of vane contact with the arrow rest and reduce the shaft's footprint to the smallest size possible — factors that improve tuning precision.

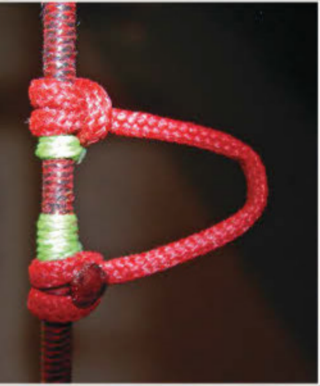
When paper tuning, attempt to tune out vertical tears first. For a tail-high tear, lower the nocking loop slightly on the bowstring or move the arrow rest up. For a tail-low tear, raise the nocking loop slightly or move the arrow rest down. Try to keep downward arrow-rest adjustments to a minimum to allow for proper vane clearance.

Once you've addressed vertical issues, fix horizontal tears. For a tail-left tear, you'll move the arrow rest very slightly to

THREE COMMON PROBLEMS

IF YOUR BOW won't tune, it could be due to one of these setup problems.

- POOR NOCK FIT: Arrow nocks that fit too tightly or too loosely on the bowstring can cause arrow-flight issues. Nocks should snap on the string snugly yet pop off when tapped firmly at the tail end. The center serving diameter should also fill the nock's throat, preventing side-to-side wobble. Try various nocks to see which one accommodates your bowstring's thickness the best. Or, have the bowstring served with thicker or thinner serving thread to address the nock-fit issue. This could solve your tuning problem.
- NOCK PINCH: An easy way to detect nock pinch is to remove the fieldpoint from the arrow. If the arrow lifts off the arrow rest while drawing it back, the nock is being pinched. To remedy this, tie in a threaded nock set (inside the nocking loop) just below where the nock snaps on the bowstring. This will create some downward pressure as the bow is drawn, while preventing the nock from being pinched by the bottom of the nocking loop.
- WEAK ARROW SPINE: A weak-spined arrow (not stiff enough for your bow) will oscillate excessively upon launch (almost like a wet noodle), causing all sorts of weird tears. Be sure you follow your arrow manufacturer's spine-selection chart and choose the right arrow shafts based on your bow's draw weight, arrow length and point weight. Generally speaking, it's better to shoot arrows that are too stiff rather than too weak.



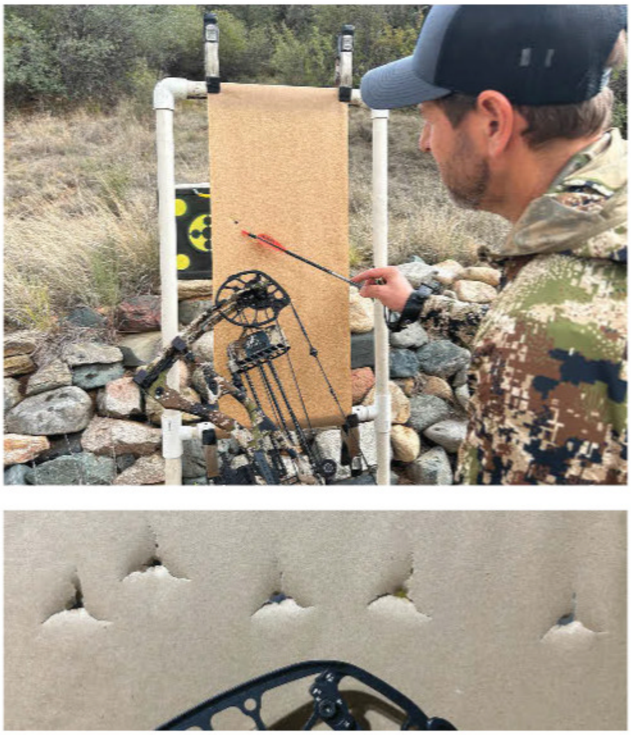
Nock pinch from your nocking loop is a common problem that results in poor accuracy. You can correct nock pinch by tying a small nock set inside the nocking loop, just below where the nock snaps onto the bowstring.

Paper tuning is the simplest, most effective method for analyzing and correcting arrow flight. When paper tuning, begin shooting from 6 feet away, then 10 feet, and even 20 yards to confirm straight arrow flight.

the right. For a tail-right tear, you'll move the arrow rest very slightly to the left. I say "very slightly," because any large tears will have to be resolved by following the next step — tuning the bow's limb harness.

Next, shoot the unfletched arrow from 10 yards away to confirm arrow flight. A clean tear should still exist. If not, the tune is not perfect. Go back and double check tears from 6 feet, 12 feet and then 10 yards.

Once you get the unfletched arrow flying perfectly, shoot a fletched arrow through the paper. If you suddenly get an irregular rip, you'll know vane contact is the culprit. You can troubleshoot by spraying the fletching area with aerosol foot powder, then shooting the arrow into a firm backstop (not through the paper tuner). Look for contact smears on the powdered vanes, then try rotating the arrow nock to eliminate the vane contact or switch to lower-profile vanes. You may also be able to address vane contact by tuning your rest so that the arrow launcher drops out of the way a bit more quickly upon bowstring release.



The paper-tuning process can take some time, and you may have to yoke tune your bow or shim your cams to correct difficult tears. In the end, however, the result should be perfect "bullet holes" indicating your fletched arrow is moving straight through the paper.

TROUBLESHOOT DIFFICULT TEARS

Sometimes, despite relentless paper-tuning effort, poor arrow flight persists. When this happens, yoke tuning and/or cam-shimming are the next steps. With large left or right tears, "shimming" one or both cams will eventually eliminate the tear. However, I prefer to yoke-tune first before altering the cam's position along the axle.

If your bow doesn't have string yokes (string harnesses that "V-out" and attach to the outer edge of the cam axles), then skip this step and move on to cam-shimming. Regardless, you'll need to press the bow and relax the limbs to perform either of these procedures.

Yoke Tuning: This method is effective because it alters the vertical position of the cam's string grooves, bringing them in line with the bowstring's path. This improves nock travel and arrow flight. Most bows are equipped with one split yoke, while others have two. Either way, start adjusting the top-limb yoke first by making one or two twists to one side of the yoke at each juncture, while untwisting the other side in equal fashion. This will keep the harness length consistent and the bow's timing and draw length the same.

With a left tear, *twist the left side of the string yoke and untwist the right side in equal amounts.* With a right tear, *twist the right side of the yoke and untwist the left in the same fashion.* Once the adjustment is made, un-press the bow, then begin paper tuning. If the tear is still ragged, re-press the bow and make another adjustment, repeating the process. Do this until you achieve a perfect arrow tear.

On a bow with a top and bottom yoke, the top yoke tends to yield the most significant tuning change, since the arrow's position is closer to the upper axle. The bottom yoke can be adjusted as well, using the same tuning procedure as with the top yoke. Experiment as needed.

Cam-Shimming: When repositioning the cam on the axle, always move the cam in the direction of the tear. If the tail-end of the arrow rips to the left, *move the cam to the left*. If it rips to the right, *move the cam to the right*. With cam-shimming, all you're doing is adjusting spacer thickness on one side of the cam relative to the other side. Remember, only move one cam at a time, then recheck arrow flight. If a poor tear persists, move the other cam as well. If your bow doesn't allow easy spacer swapping, contact the bow's manufacturer and request an assortment of spacers.

BROADHEAD TUNING

Once your fletched arrows are cutting through the paper perfectly, the next step is to shoot downrange while examining accuracy. For this step, equip three shafts with fieldpoints and three with broadheads, ensuring all spin true.

Start shooting groups at 30 yards, then compare impact points. If broadheads group to the right of the fieldpoints, move the arrow rest to the left. If broadheads hit left, move the arrow rest to the right. If broadheads impact high, move the arrow rest down slightly. If broadheads hit low, move the arrow rest up. Make very small (just a few hundredths of an inch at a time), incremental changes until your fieldpoint and broadhead groups come together.

Even slight contact between your vanes and your arrow rest will ruin downrange broadhead accuracy. Applying a spray-on powder to your vanes offers an easy way to check for contact after the shot.

Broadhead tuning is a critical component of your overall bow-tuning process, helping ensure you'll get results in the field that are as good as you enjoy on the practice range. By comparing where your broadheads hit the target relative to fieldpoints, you make small adjustments to your rest and/or yokes to bring the two impact points together.

OUTDOOR RANGE

Now, repeat the process but extend the shooting distance to 40 and then 50 yards. If impact points don't change much after adjusting the arrow rest, or if the arrow groups are more than four inches apart to begin with, revert back to yoke tuning to bring the groups closer together.

If broadheads group to the right of the fieldpoints, *make a twist to the left side of the yoke and untwist to the right.* If broadheads group to the left, *twist the right side of the yoke and untwist the left.* Continue to do this until the arrow groups merge. To micro-tune further, you can make half-twists to the yoke or go back to making small rest adjustments, depending on the results.

Tuning your bow doesn't have to be a nightmare. Simply take it one step at a time and work through the process slowly. Most of today's bows will tune exceptionally well, producing a level of shooting consistency you've never seen before. That's exactly what you need to increase your effectiveness in the woods this fall. **BH**

FINAL ACCURACY TWEAK

IF YOU REMAIN a little dissatisfied with your shooting consistency, try bare-shaft tuning. To do this, shoot two fletched arrows and an unfletched arrow (the same electrical-taped bare shaft you used for paper tuning). Tip all these arrows with fieldpoints.

Shoot each arrow at the same bull's-eye from 15-30 yards away, but make sure it's a non-windy day. The arrows should hit pretty much in the same spot. If not, make some minor adjustments to your nocking loop and arrow rest. For example, if your unfletched arrow strikes above the fletched arrows, move the arrow rest down or the nocking loop up. If it strikes below, move the arrow rest up or nocking loop down. If it impacts left of the fletched arrows, move the arrow rest slightly to the left. If it impacts to the right, move the arrow rest slightly to the right. Keep adjusting until the bare shaft tracks with the fletched arrows.

Bare-shaft tuning can be effective because it's more sensitive to tuning adjustments compared to fletched shafts. This can often yield improved accuracy with fixed-blade broadheads. Give it a shot!

Bare-shaft tuning — working to get a bare arrow shaft to impact the same place as your fletched arrows — is a great way to take your bow's tune to the next level.

JON E. SILKS | GEAR TESTING EDITOR

BEAR WHITETAIL INT RTH

A COMPLETE BOWHUNTING PACKAGE AT A SWEET PRICE

A NEW BEAR WHITETAIL! WHAT? That's the bow I started with nearly 45 years ago! I took my very first deer with the Whitetail Hunter (Oh, the memories). And while the base name and quality remain the same, the performance of the Whitetail INT is on a whole other level than that bow.

Outfitted with Bear's adjustable EKO Cam and Muscle Split Limbs, the new Whitetail INT sends arrows downrange at an advertised 339 fps. A reflex riser with flared structure and bridging is built to provide a stiff shooting platform while also serving as the base for the built-in grip, expanded accessory-mounting options and cable roller slide. Plus, this is a Ready-To-Hunt (RTH) package, which would have been nice back in the day, since I taped a barn burner matchstick to my riser for an aiming point. Let's take a closer look at this impressive setup.

Performance & Adjustability

Along with available letoff settings of 75, 80, 85 and 90 percent (an arrow on the oblong draw stop can be rotated to reach the desired letoff), the EKO dual cam uses rotating modules to span the 26-30-inch draw-length range, in half-inch increments. No bow press is needed for either draw length or letoff adjustments, and changes will not impact peak draw weight or cam timing, which is set at the factory. The three-track cam system is machined from aluminum and employs Headhunter 452X string and cables. A chart in the manual will guide you to the correct draw stop and module settings that are clearly engraved on the base cam and module so you find the fit customized for you.

Hub With Flare

Bear outfits the Whitetail INT with a reflex riser that employs detailed bridg-

THE SPECS

Manufacturer: Bear Archery, 800-694-9494; beararchery.com

Model: Whitetail INT RTH

Riser: Reflex, aluminum, advanced accessory mounting

Grip: Contoured riser handle, rubber side inserts

Limbs: Bear Muscle, split, resin-wrapped fiberglass

Draw Weights: 45–60 pounds or 55–70 pounds

Draw Lengths: 26–30 inches, in half-inch increments; rotating module

Cam System: EKO, Dual

Letoff: 75, 80, 85 and 90 percent, adjustable; 86.48 percent as tested

String: Head Hunter, X99, 59.5625 inches

Cables (x2): Head Hunter, X99, 35.125 inches

Brace Height: 6.5 inches

Axle-to-Axle Length: 31 inches

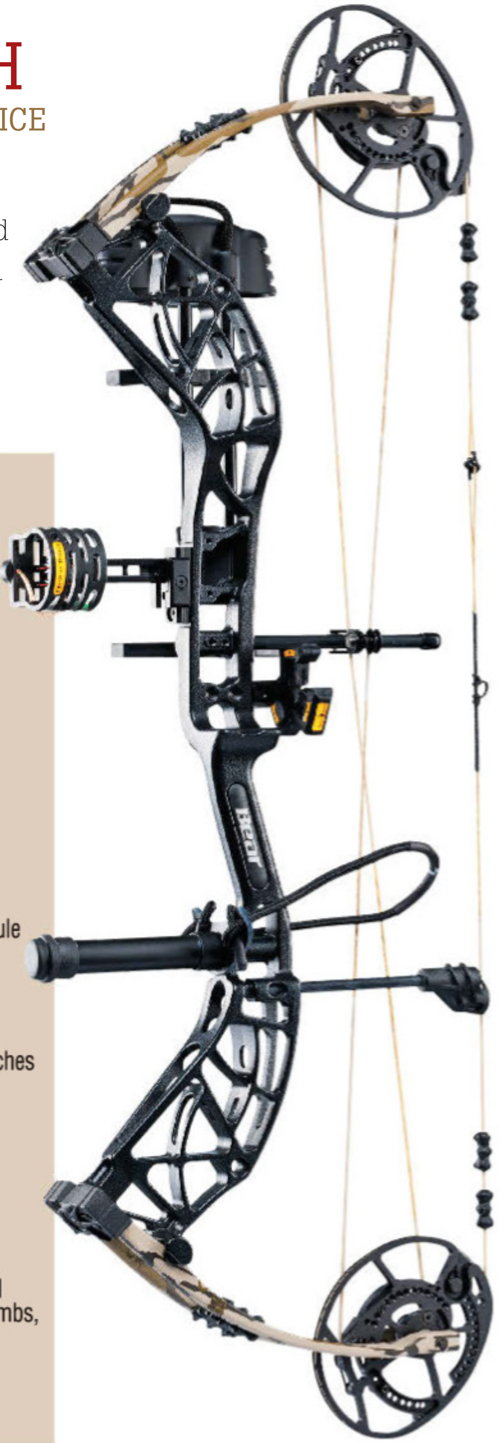
Weight: 4 pounds (advertised and as tested)

Finish: Olive, Stone, Black riser w/Veil Whitetail or Mossy Oak Bottomland limbs, Olive riser w/Fred Bear Camo limbs

Advertised ATA Speed: 339 fps

MSRP: $729.99

Comments: High performance and shooting experience marks, especially considering the price tag!



Bear Archery's new Whitetail INT RTH puts on a show with fast arrow speeds, high dynamic efficiency marks and a positive shooting experience, all in a lightweight bow.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

RINEHART BRICK WALL TARGET SYSTEM

A STAPLE OF our archey testing is Rinehart Targets' (rinehart3d.com) Brick Wall Target available in 30-inch **($1,269.99)** and 48-inch **($2,909.99)** options. The 48-inch Brick we have consists of individual bricks/pieces that measure 4 inches tall by 15 inches deep 48 inches wide, along with a smaller "topper" piece outfitted with an embedded clamping and threaded rods along the sides that allow the stack of bricks to be securely clamped perform as a single unit. The system's most important feature is the solid, self-healing material developed by company founder John Rinehart back in the late 1990s.

The Brick Wall can be customized to meet specific needs or purchased as a unit, as we did more than 10 years ago. While bricks can be flipped or reordered in the stack, we have not had to make any changes since our initial purchase. In fact, our investment has paid off many times over. Although targets may not generally be considered a shop tool, there's no doubt the Brick Wall is one of the most important components in our shop.

ing and flared sections both top and bottom that are designed to strategically add strength and increase rigidity throughout the platform. This, in turn, results in a base that promotes consistency and downrange accuracy. In addition to the standard mounting holes for an arrow rest and sight, you will find Bear's Picatinny mount that can be placed on the sight window's front surface for inline sights and a dovetail mount on the riser's rear facing surface, just above the shelf, to accommodate arrow rests compatible with the Integrate Mounting System (IMS). The RTH package includes a 5-arrow quiver, stabilizer, peep sight, wrist sling, In-Line IMS V-Biscuit rest and Fatal 4-Pin Sight.

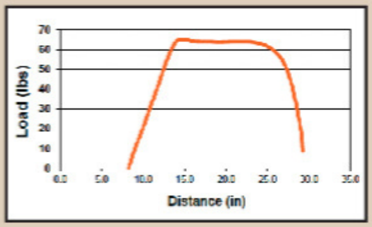
Bear's Ready-To-Hunt (RTH) package from Trophy Ridge includes a generous complement of bow accessories designed to help you hit the ground running.

The Whitetail INT's riser handle is contoured and sized to create the bow's grip that, along with the attached rubber side plates, provides comfort and results in a neutral wrist position. Bear's cable-containment system uses a carbon rod with a quad roller slide — one for each cable and two that contact the rod to minimize friction and increase efficiency. Finally, a riser-mounted, rubber-tipped string stop quickly stops string oscillation for less vibration and noise.

SPEED & ENERGY

	375-GRAIN ARROW	425-GRAIN ARROW
ARROW SPEED	305.3 fps	288.3 fps
KINETIC ENERGY	77.6 ft./lbs.	78.5 ft./lbs.
DYNAMIC EFFICIENCY	85.3%	86.2%
AVERAGE NOISE LEVEL	91.5 dBA	90.8 dBA

DRAW-FORCE CURVE



EDITOR'S NOTE: All of our Bow Tests are conducted using the same standardized procedures and professionally calibrated testing equipment. Bows are tested with a draw length of 29 inches and a draw weight of 65 pounds, unless otherwise noted.

Muscle Up

The 11.5-inch Muscle limbs are split and made with Bear's proprietary, compression-molding process. These limbs are built with fiberglass that's wrapped in resin and matched into sets based on deflection values. Limbs are available in 45-60-pound or 55-70-pound draw weights and the following colors/camo patterns: Olive, Stone, Mossy Oak Bottomland, Veil Whitetail or Fred Bear. Limbs are aligned to the riser with an independent, cast aluminum pocket complete with Bear's pinch rocker system.

At The Range

The Whitetail INT performed at a high level considering the price. While drawing, the bow reaches peak relatively quickly and holds there to build energy before dropping into a very solid back wall. Arrow speeds were quick, shock and vibration were average and made much better with a quality stabilizer. Shot noise — other than an easily managed string vibration — was stealth-like. The riser/grip is notably narrow; however, there is a small, flat section on the back that aids in consistency. A steady hold on target and slow follow-through promote accuracy. The RTH package is sure to be a hit, as it puts a bowhunter in the game right out of the gate thanks to a full complement of accessories. **BH**

WHAT'S NEW

MARK DEMKO | ASSOCIATE EDITOR

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LANCASTERARCHERY.COM

KUIU *Super Down Haven Line*

Late-season bowhunting often means gnarly conditions, so you need tough, dependable clothes to match. Enter this new whitetail-hunting line from KUIU. The Super Down Haven set sports an ultra-quiet outer fabric coupled with KUIU's Quixdown insulation to handle the coldest hunting conditions. Jacket ($499) highlights include a removable hood with streamlined profile for unrestricted hearing and peripheral vision, raised collar, neck gasket and safety harness port. Bibs ($429) have fully adjustable, removable suspenders, six heat-pack pockets and warm, fleece-lined hand pockets. Warm, windproof and light, this set is made for anything Mother Nature throws at it. Comes in sizes S-3XL. **kuiu.com**

BROWNING TRAIL CAMERAS
Defender Vision Pro HD

This cellular trail camera has it all. It starts with "ALL HD ALL THE TIME" imagery, plus an on-demand feature that lets you request a photo or video immediately, at any time. The Defender Vision Pro HD ($149.99) boasts 24MP image capability, an adjustable .135- to .7-second trigger speed, 110-foot infrared flash range at night, adjustable detection range to 80 feet, GPS Theft Protection Security System and exceptional battery life (runs on eight AAs). The camera also comes with pre-installed dual SIM cards and a high-gain antenna, helping ensure you always receive your images, no matter the camera's location.
browningtrailcameras.com

LATITUDE OUTDOORS
Ranger 22 Hunting Pack

This rugged, 1,020-cubic-inch pack redefines versatility through its combination of adaptable design, customizable storage options and ergonomic comfort. With the Ranger 22 ($224.99), you no longer need to switch packs between seasons or during sudden weather shifts to accommodate all your gear and clothing. From hot summer days to frosty fall and early winter mornings, the Ranger 22 ensures your gear stays organized, secure and accessible in the order you need it. The pack measures 11x18x6 inches, weighs 4 pounds and comes in Gray, Tan, Realtree Advantage Classic or Realtree Original. Pack it once and hunt all year!
latitudeoutdoors.com

SPOT-HOGG ARCHERY
Boonie Bowsight

Exceptional versatility and performance are hallmarks of this game-changing bowsight from Spot-Hogg. The Boonie ($379.99-$519.99) features interchangeable sight bars for mounting on a Pic rail, dovetail bar or hard mount (sold separately); micro-adjustable second and third axes; improved windage adjustment capabilities; quick-disconnect for travel; and a removable sight tape wheel for multiple arrow setups. The sight comes in a variety of pin configurations, .010- and .019-inch pin thicknesses and is available in right- and left-handed models. Compact and lightweight, it weighs 10 percent less than Spot-Hogg's Fast Eddie. It's also backed by a lifetime warranty. **spot-hogg.com**

SEVR BROADHEADS
Titanium 1.5-Inch 4-Blade Hybrid

Hard-hitting impact and a 2.2-inch total blade cut highlight this rear-deploying, 4-blade mechanical broadhead. The Titanium (Ti) 1.5-Inch 4-Blade Hybrid is built off a one-piece titanium ferrule and precision-ground tip, with the 1.5-inch locking and pivoting main blade and .7-inch-wide fixed bleeder blade doing the heavy lifting. The end result is a total cut that's 46 percent larger than SEVR's 1.5-inch head. The Titanium Hybrid ($19.99 each) also comes with SEVR's patented Practice Lock mode that keeps the blades secured in the ferrule so you can practice with the actual broadheads you'll hunt with. The head comes in 100- and 125-grain options. **sevrbroadheads.com**

TROPHY RIDGE
Rechargeable Sight Light

Ensure you can see your pins until the last possible moment of legal shooting light and say goodbye to buying batteries with Trophy Ridge's Rechargeable Sight Light ($29.99). This light's universal fit ensures it works with almost any bowsight model, while the adjustable brightness lets you control the light intensity for perfect pin illumination at any time of the day. The light is rugged, compact, lightweight and water-resistant, making it perfect for taking on even the most challenging bowhunting conditions. Comes with a charging cord. **beararchery.com**

SCENT THIEF *Takes a Different Approach to Odor Control*

As bowhunters, we need to be close to our quarry for a reasonable chance at success. And while you may get away with a deer or elk hearing you, or possibly even seeing you, if it picks up your scent, it's usually game over. That's why so many companies have focused on developing products that either mask or transform scent molecules or break down the bacteria that cause human odors.

Scent Thief, on the other hand, has taken a different approach, focusing on neutralizing game animals' sense of smell by relaxing the olfactory epithelium, tissue that lines the nasal cavity, to prevent them from detecting any odors.

"Once Scent Thief enters the nose, the vapors bind to the scent receptors in the nasal epithelium, temporarily numbing them," said Scent Thief Director of Operations Jacob Carpenter. "The olfactory nerve then cannot transmit any recognized smell to the brain. So, when that happens, our brains, and the brains of any mammal that comes in contact with Scent Thief, are trying to connect the sensation of that numbing effect to a previous memory.

"For me, I think it smells like Vicks VapoRub, but we have many people that think it smells like pine, dirt, cotton candy, gasoline and a lot of other random smells. For an animal, we don't know what they associate it with, but in all of our studies, it seems to have a calming/relaxing effect on wildlife."

To use Scent Thief, you simply spray it on your hunting clothes, boots and/or equipment as you get ready to head afield. For maximum effectiveness, the company recommends you then reapply every 60-90 minutes. It also encourages you to spray it on any areas that might pick up your scent, like the base of the tree you're climbing, the area immediately around your blind and even the vegetation every 100 yards or so as you walk in/out of the woods.

"Because our patented formula is water-based, when it evaporates there is no residue left behind," Carpenter explained. "As Scent Thief evaporates, the vapors are released into the air and the goal is for your target animal to 'smell' Scent Thief. In order for Scent Thief to work, those vapors have to be present and because our products work through their evaporation, that's why it's extremely important to reapply."

Scent Thief is available in several options including a Combo Pack ($26.99) consisting of a 12-ounce bottle of spray and 32-ounce refill jug, and Wafers ($5.99 each) that you can use to help create a "No Smell" zone around your hunting location. **scentthief.com**

WHERE TO GO MARKETPLACE

For advertising questions, please contact Jeff Millar at 717-991-8244; jeff.millar@outdoorsg.com
Subscription questions or problems, call 800-829-2543

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WITH CURT WELLS | EDITOR-AT-LARGE

The cold, silent conditions in the Saskatchewan woods can be a real challenge when it comes to getting a shot off at an unsuspecting whitetail.

Q **I'M PLANNING a late-season deer hunt north of the border in Saskatchewan. I know how to keep warm, but what about my gear, bow, etc.? Got any tips for me?** — *C. Sampson, via email*

A WHEN HUNTING cold weather, your greatest challenge, other than keeping warm, is noise. While sound travels faster in warmer air, colder temperatures and low humidity in winter cause sound waves to transmit more efficiently and with less absorption. Also, snow reflects and amplifies sound, adding to the perception of increased volume. The slightest noise can ruin your day.

Consequently, your outer layer of clothing must be silent as you draw, and one contributing factor is the ease with which you can draw your bow. It should always be smooth and effortless. That can be a challenge when the limbs on both your bow and your body are cold and stiff. I always recommend a reduction in draw weight for late-season bowhunting. Turn your draw weight down until full draw comes easily, then adjust your sight pins accordingly.

Snow is your enemy. Just a couple snowflakes in your peep can cost you a shot. Same with a clump of snow in your sight pins, on your arrow rest, or in your release mechanism. Even an ice buildup in the track of your bow's cam can potentially derail your string, and it only takes a small amount of snow on the lens of your rangefinder to render it momentarily useless. These are problems you don't need, and your only preventative strategy is awareness — constantly checking your gear in snowy weather is critical.

In all bowhunting, footwork is a major consideration. Nothing good happens unless your feet are where they need to be. This is a problem when there is snow on the ground that can get caught in the tread of your boots. When you stand, the pressure can turn that snow to ice — crunchy, noisy ice chunks that will betray you. I always sweep all the snow out of my boot soles and off my stand platform, or the ground inside a blind. Once, I even salted a stand platform that got hit by an ice storm. Unfortunately, I had to listen to it drip for an hour.

Of course, if you use any accessories that require a battery, you'll find out that cold temperatures can drain your power. You'll need to use fresh batteries, preferably lithium, that last much longer in the cold and are lighter than alkaline batteries.

The best practice, once you get settled into your stand or blind, is to go through all the motions necessary to take a shot. Does your chair squeak? Are there any noises when you draw your bow? Does your arrow shaft sing when you drag it across your arrow rest? Are you wearing a facemask that alters your anchor point or the view through your peep? These things may seem obvious, but you can't address problems you don't know exist. Assuming all is well is a recipe for disaster.

Good luck in Saskatchewan. It can be one of the coldest, quietest whitetail-hunting destinations on earth, and it will test your preparedness. **BH**

AUTHOR'S PHOTOS

You might be able to stay cozy in the cold, but the real test comes when you and your gear must perform at the moment of truth.

E-mail your ASK **BOWHUNTER** questions to bowhunter_magazine@outdoorsg.com

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